

USDA Consultation

Tribal Transcript for FDPIR Regional Vendor Distribution Pilot

07/19/11

Thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in a listen only mode. After the presentation we will conduct a question and answer session. To ask a question please press star one. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. Now I will turn over the meeting to Ms. Darlene Barnes. You may begin.

Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Darlene Barnes, Regional Administrator for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. And I really want to welcome you and thank you for taking the time to participate in our tribal consultation on FDPIR Regional Vendor Pilot that we've been discussing. Today's consultation is one of two sessions. The one today and the second one is being held in Washington, D.C. with Undersecretary Kevin Concannon.

Before we get started I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Barbara Lopez to talk about some of the logistics of our meeting which is taking place both in person as well as over the phone. So I'll turn it to Barbara.

Great. Thanks so much, Darlene. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's session. As Darlene mentioned, today's session is available both in person and over the phone, and we recognize that quite a few people are logged on to the phone conference piece of the consultation so I wanted to go over just a couple logistics. First, you are currently logged on into conference mode, which means that your line is muted. However if you press star one on your phone you'll be able to connect with the operator who will connect you with us and you'll be able to dialogue with us. So again, it's going to be star one on your phone and that'll open up your phone line. Also if you registered in advance, we emailed to you a couple handouts, about four documents. We emailed them yesterday and today in the morning. There are four documents that we think will help with today's discussion. They include a brief overview of what the potential pilot and concept is, we included a map of FDPIR Indian tribal organizations, where they exist across the country, and we also included our consultation schedule for the remaining year of 2011 and 2012. If you did not receive those documents, those handouts, that's okay. We can send them to you now. We will be doing some introductions, again you're going to press star one on your phone and at that time you can let us know if you received the handouts, and if you did not, you can share with us your either email address or your fax number, and we'll be able to send those to you within the next five to ten minutes. We want to make sure you have the documents available.

I also want to mention that today's consultation session is being recorded and transcribed, and it will be part of the official USDA Food and Nutrition Service Consultation record. With that said, it's very helpful and important if you can identify yourselves either as a tribal leader, or tribal member or their designee, or program staff. We want to make sure we capture who you are correctly in that transcription for the consultation record.

So we'll go ahead now and start with introductions, and we'll start with introductions here in the room first and then we'll move to phone introductions by pressing star one on your phone. And again, welcome everybody. My name is Barbara Lopez. I work with USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Again, Darlene Barnes, Regional Administrator, USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Rogelio Carrasco with the – a program analyst with the Distribution Division in Washington.

Bud Squirrel. I'm with the Cherokee Nation program, Food Distribution Program, in Oklahoma.

Darlene Sanchez. I'm the Regional Director for Special Nutrition Programs in Denver, Colorado.

I'm Kaya Shock. I work for the Food Distribution Division of the Food and Nutrition Service in D.C.

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Hi. Sara Smith Holmes, Section Chief out of the Mountain Plains Regional Office working with the Food Distribution Program on Indian reservations.

We also have some program staff joining us on the phone. If you can introduce yourselves, please, out of the Washington, D.C. office.

Hi. It's Cathie McCullough with Food Distribution Division for FNS.

Laura Castro, also with Food Distribution Division, FNS.

Dan Sullivan, Food Distribution, FNS.

Shirley Roberts, Food Distribution, FNS.

Great. Thank you. And we'll go ahead now and do phone introductions for folks that are joining us to today's consultation on the phone. Again you're going to press star one on your phone. You'll be able to introduce – join us in introductions and let us know if you received the handouts. Operator, please if you can let us know if anyone's in the queue.

Yes, one moment please for the first question. The first question is from Mary Green Trottier.

Yes, I'm here.

Hi, Mary. Did you receive our handouts today?

No, I haven't.

Okay. We'd like to share them with you. Do you have an email address or a fax number?

Are they the ones that are located on the website?

Yes, they are.

Okay. I have them.

Okay. Great. Wonderful.

I wanted to make sure they were the same.

Yes they are. Great. I just want to mention thank you for reminding me, Mary. Our – today's handouts are also available on the USDA FNS public website, so if anyone needs them, you can also get them directly there. Operator, there is the next person for introductions?

Yes, the next person is Lauren King Dillon.

Hello, Lauren King Dillon from Food Distribution in Washington, D.C.

Hi. Welcome.

Hello. I did not receive the handouts but I will find them on the website.

Okay. Great. And that web address for folks if you happen to not have it is www.fns.usda.gov/fns/tribal. Operator is there –

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Yes.

For introductions.

The next person is Tommy.

Hi. I'm Tommy Openchowski from the FNS over in Washington D.C., and I have the documents.

Thank you, Tommy.

The next person is Betty Jo.

Hi. This is Betty Jo Graveen, Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin. I'm the Program Director.

Hi, Betty, welcome. Did you receive our handouts?

No, I haven't. Would you be able to share either a fax number or an email address and we'd be happy to send them to you.

My email address is fdpbetty@frontier.com.

Okay. So that's fdpbetty@frontier.com? Is that correct?

Yes.

Great. Wonderful. We'll make sure to send those to you in the next five –

Okay.

Thank you.

The next person is Peggy.

Uh, yeah. Peggy Bazant, Midwest Region, Red Cliff Food Distribution Program. And I didn't receive anything.

You do not.

No.

Okay. We'll be happy to share them with you. Do you have a fax number or an email address?

I have a fax number.

Okay.

715-779-3730.

So that's 715-779-3730?

Yes, that's it.

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Great. We'll fax those over to you momentarily. Thank you.

Um hmm.

The next person is Patrick.

Yeah, this is Patrick Dardis, Kansas City Commodity office. I'm joined by Patty Jennings and Linda Bolton. We did receive the handouts. Thanks.

Wonderful. Thanks for joining, Patrick.

The next person is Liz, is it Hankin?

Liz Hankin. Southwest Region, and yes, I have the handouts, thank you.

Thank you, Liz.

The next person is Sam, is it Spang?

Yes.

Hi, Sam. Welcome.

Hello.

Did you receive our handouts?

Yes, I received them.

Okay, great. Thank you for joining us.

The next person is – is it Roxanna Newsom?

Yes. Hi. This is Roxanna Newsom. I am President of NAFFDPIR.

Hi, Roxanna, welcome.

Thank you.

Did you receive our handouts?

Well, I'm on the website. I'm having trouble opening one of them. If you could email them to me at roxanna.n as in nancy, ewsom as in mary @chickasaw c-h-i-c-k-a-s-a-w .net.

Great. Wonderful. We'll get them to you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

The next person is – is it Ronnie Owens?

It's Lonnie Owens.

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Hi. Did you receive our handouts?

Yes I did.

Okay, great. Wonderful. Thank you for joining.

The next person is Lorraine Davis.

Hello. I did receive all the handouts.

Hi. Great. Wonderful. Thank you.

The next person is Phyllis.

Hi, this is Phyllis Wolfe in the Southwest Region, and yes, I did receive the handouts.

Great. Thank you, Phyllis.

You're welcome.

No further questions at this time.

Okay. It's – again, it's star one. We'll just do one last check in case anybody joined us that's a couple minutes late. We're doing introductions. Over the phone it's star one on your phone. We'd be glad to hear from you. If you're joining us we want to also make sure you received our handouts for today's session. Operator, can you do one last check please?

Certainly. One moment please. Charles Redgate, your line is open.

Thank you. Good afternoon everybody. This is Charles Gates. Everybody knows me as Red for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe representing Chairman Charles Murphy.

Welcome, Red. Thank you for joining. Did you receive our handouts?

I'm trying to find them on the web now. I'll locate them. If not, maybe you can email them to me.
cgates@standingrock.org.

Great. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

The next person is Chris Henley.

Hi. Chris Henley from FNS Southwest Region.

Hi, Chris. Thanks for joining.

Good. Hi.

The next person is Pat Roberts.

Hi. Pat Roberts from Menominee.

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Hi, Pat. Welcome. Did you receive our handouts?

No, I did not. We're trying to download them now, but it's – we're having trouble.

Oh, okay. If you have an email address or a fax –

Right. Email please.

Sure.

Proberts@mitw.org.

proberts@mitw.org?

Right.

We'll send them out to you momentarily. Thank you for coming.

Thank you.

No further questions at this time.

Great. Thank you. I'll go ahead and hand the call back to our consulting official Darlene Barnes.

Ah, thanks, Barbara. Again, good afternoon everyone. As we begin, I want to recognize the limited amount of time between the invitation and today's consultation. I want to stress that UFDA does take its consulting obligations very seriously and again I know that there have been some concerns about the amount of time between the, the invitation and today's consultation. But I wanted to stress to you that we only recently received – excuse me, received permission to proceed with this pilot, which we are planning to begin in calendar year 2012. At the same time the work to negotiate new contracts for assisting multi-food distribution sites currently serviced by Americold and Paris Brothers is already underway. The area or areas selected for this pilot will need to be pulled out of the larger multi-food contracts. We must settle those locations as quickly as we can so that we do not interfere with the ability to secure a contract for the rest of the Indian tribal organizations. We regret that we were not able to have a longer period of time to notify you in preparation for this consultation, and again, we do take this seriously and have heard some of your concerns and hopefully we can work together through this session to really have a good dialogue about this pilot.

The concept of a regional vendor pilot in FDPIR has been part of many discussions throughout the years, most recently at the national FDPIR conference in Oklahoma which I attended. And our hope is that this pilot will provide a model for the program that results in increased purchase of locally-grown and traditional food into a regional FDPIR food package at a cost that can be supported by the program. We anticipate the pilot lasting at least one year, hopefully longer, depending upon our budget and the early success of the pilot.

So again, thank you for making the time today and for those FDPIR program staff, we hope that you can bring this conversation back to your tribal leaders. After this week's consultation, each tribe participating in FDPIR will receive a letter addressed to their tribal leadership asking them if they want to participate in the pilot, and it – and it is important that we hear back from any interested tribe.

Now I'm going to turn it over to Cathie McCullough from our national office, who will walk us through our ideas about how the pilot might work and the timelines. I want to stress that we are sharing our thinking

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about the pilot and that we are interested in your thoughts, reactions and ideas to help us shape this effort so that it is very successful. Again, thank you for your participation today, and I will turn it over to Cathie.

Hello, everybody. It's – it's Cathie, on the D.C. end of the connection. Can you hear me okay on the Denver side?

Yes.

We can hear you.

Okay, good. I was asked to talk about a recap of the pilot, which you can see in your – as soon as you receive your handouts you can see a written copy of this, but just to talk through it, we are all familiar with the current system which is that USDA buys the foods that are approved in the food package, and we send them to the two centralized warehouses both in Missouri, right now, run by Americold and run by Paris Brothers, where the foods are stored and broken down into smaller shipments and then shipped out to the ITOs. That is not the best of the systems that are out there as far as we're concerned, and I think the same goes for you because of the time lag that it takes to buy the national shipments and send them into the warehouses to be stripped down to be sent out to further destinations. The additional transportation that's required that goes along with that, and also what's extremely important, I think, in trying something new here today is the ability to get more locally-procured foods and to be able to access traditional preferences for the different regions. So, for example, if the tribes in the northwest prefer to have salmon but the rest of the country is not so interested, a regional based distribution system would accommodate that. Likewise, you know, bison in the Dakotas, maybe wild rice in another region, pinto beans in this region and black beans in that region. You know what I'm saying. This – this would allow us to have a regionally-based food package, which I will talk about more, but just to set the tone for some things we could accomplish if we were able to get to a regionally-based system. We want to pilot this like we did about ten years ago. Most of us were in some way involved ten years ago and remember that we tried this in the Midwest region where Reinhart Foods worked as the distributor and in that case USDA did not buy the foods, Reinhart was responsible for buying and distributing all of the foods. That pilot was very successful in terms of customer satisfaction. Unfortunately on the cost comparison it came out considerably higher than the existing model of the USDA buying the foods and the – and setting up a warehousing and distribution system. So we were unable to secure approval to move forward with a regionally-based system at that time because of the cost difference. I'm hoping that as we try this in the upcoming year that the costs will level out more this – I believe this is a different day and age in terms of transportation costs, you know the gas costs are higher now. I think that commercial distributors are probably – there are more of them out there and they're better equipped to handle this sort of a business so that we can – they can get their costs to be more neutral with ours, and I think, you know, we can get more to the locally-procured foods certainly, and the – and the regional and tribal preferences. So as Darlene Barnes was saying, we recently received permission to proceed with a pilot, and I'm very excited about that. I hope you are too. We're setting aside money in fiscal year – this upcoming fiscal year 12 so that we can conduct a pilot in the – in the calendar year 2012. As Darlene said, we'll go for at least a year so that we can collect enough data to compare and then see where the – where the results take us and where the budget takes us into the future. The consultation session today and on Thursday is to talk about how – you know, you – what is the best way to design that pilot and also to figure out, to find out who is interested in being a participant.

So the things that we want to talk about, as we said, who, where should it be, what foods will we be talking about, how will we best find and lock in a contractor to do this business, and what are important factors to gauge as we try to compare a pilot to the current system. Those are the things that are on my mind, but I would – I would love to hear what all of you are thinking about the best way to – what we want to do is set this up so that we have the best chance of success. So that we can ideally turn this into a national system ultimately.

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So as we finish these discussions this week, each tribal leader is going to get a letter asking for if they are interested in participating in the pilot. And we will also, in the same way that we did with this consultation notice, we will also be reaching out directly to the program directors through our regions so that the tribal leader or their designee can let us know if they are interested in participating.

That's about it as far as an overview. I – I think it's best to just open it up and have a conversation about it or take questions or comments or whatever you have to say.

For folks on the phone, as a reminder, if you press star one on the phone you'll be able to connect with the operator and then connect with us. To dialogue with us, it's star one on your phone. Operator please

–

Yes, one moment please for the first question. Pat Roberts, your line is open.

Thank you. Before we start on this, one of the big questions was on the last time we did the pilot project was the number of people that would be laid off through USDA FSAM, you know, marketing, how will that affect them this time if it's going to a pilot project and there's going to be considered layoffs that nobody wants.

Good question, Pat. I think we have enough other work to do in Food Distribution Division or – as well as our partners in Farm Service Agency and Ag Marketing Service because we are also trying to establish some new business models in our – in our other programs. We also actually, in addition to food distribution on Indian reservations, we also run TFAS and Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and most of our buying actually goes to the schools, so at the moment we have plenty of work to do and we will just have to build that consideration in to the, into the, into the analysis.

Okay.

Operator, is there someone else on the queue?

Yes. The next person is Betty Graveen.

Hi. I come from the same region that Pat does. We're, oh, three hours apart, but, when we had that pilot project the last time, it was, I mean we had it for a year and then it was taken away because of the cost effectiveness of the food, but times have changed since then with the economy the way it is and I believe I talked with Laura and a couple of others out in D.C. last year, and I says it – I think it would stimulate the economy more if we went to these pilot projects because the business people, the – the – I mean, it's just, the labels, the vendor that we had, I could set my clock by him. He was here on the day he was supposed to be here. They helped unload the truck. They accounted for everything. And the foods were just – I mean they were very consistent whereas now, we're getting these ugly black and white labels again, and it's, I mean it's just – it might be – I mean we're glad to get the foods but we – we still should be able to have attractive looking food package. And there's room for mistakes with these cans all being the same. I think it's Hart's or – is the name brand there, and – and the people just – we had more participation when we had the pilot program and I think that, um, it was just very successful except for what they claimed was the cost of the food. But we definitely, I'm here on behalf of our tribal government, too, because I'm the secretary for our tribal government also, so we definitely are going to show interest in the – in the food package and being in the pilot again. It's a very worthwhile project.

Thank you, Betty, for your comments. Greatly appreciate it, and again, probably another chance for me to mention why the need to have consultations so quickly on this so that we could try to move out and take advantage of the permission that we got and the budget based on the – some of the points you made as well about how well the program did work before, the pilot worked before.

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Okay. Thanks.

The next question is from Roxanna.

I have a – I have several little questions and comments. I'm wondering do you have any document from the last pilot project that was conducted in the Midwest Region to set aside the costs of the program, that all of the other factors with the project, is there – is there data or information that would be helpful going into this one to know what was really successful with that project and what were the barriers making that project work so that we don't make some of the same mistakes or even going in figure out what really works and what we might want to recreate this time?

Did you want to stop there and –

Yeah, yeah. Sure. I'd like to.

That one and then go on? Yes, yes. I'm glad you brought that up. There is documentation from the last go-around. I've picked through the executive summary. I would like to hand it off to the selection panel when we get to that point to help us figure out what we need to – you know, was that the best way to – was that the best way to analyze the data, are there other things that we should consider. I want them to have everything they possibly can to figure out putting our best foot forward.

Okay. And the other one of my questions is, do I – am I reading this correctly to say this time you're not proposing that it be an entire region that participates, that it could just be some programs out of a region as long as the grouping works logistically?

Sure. I think – as far as I'm concerned, I am open to any suggestions about the best grouping here. A lot of this – it's hard to do anything until we get a true sense of who's interested.

Right.

But if we, if we just say for the moment that everybody's interested, then we can sit down and the selection panel can sit down, and I need to talk about that actually, can sit down with the look of it and figure out how to move forward.

Okay.

But, since you brought it up, let me tell you what I was thinking about, how will we go about selecting the grouping. And, and I don't think it needs to be set exactly according to an FNS region or anything. I imagine in my mind that it would be some, some grouping that, that, first of all will attract a contractor, you know, so that we can, so that we can conceivably get the work done, and second of all that is a – is a decent makeup so that we can gather the best data to – to make our point about how this compares to the current system. But the – it has to go through a vetting process. I – I certainly don't want to be in the middle of that, but I would propose to the group, and I would love to hear suggestions on this, that we have a panel maybe of three USDA representatives that understand the logistics of it and three panel members that are selected by the National Association of FDPIR so that we could have a cross section, you know, people who – who understand the effects on the ground level of – of the program and people who have to run the contract on the – on the federal side.

I – personally I think that sounds, I think that sounds suitable. My other question had to do with – and I – I get by looking at all the materials that it's really going to take the panel or the – the group that really does the nitty gritty work of all this to set something up. Do you have any sense of the timeline that you're looking at working with here?

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Other than – I have a personal sense of urgency about this because – and actually the Farm Service Agency folks are on the phone, but they have already gone out and thinking about the bigger existing multi-food contracts that we have with Americold and Paris Brothers right now, they are already on the street, in other words going out to industry and saying okay, it's time for us to renew these contracts in this December, December 2011, and they're already seeking interested parties in bidding on the next round of contracts. So to me we cannot move fast enough to decide what area are we pulling out of that contract or set of contracts so that –so that we know what we're dealing with here. Um, what can I tell you for sure. So we have the two – the two consultation sessions, you know, today on the nineteenth and again on the twenty-first, a letter goes out as, as we conclude those consultation sessions and – and says let us know by mail or email or fax if you're interested, and the – I believe we should have those interested parties' responses because you can do it so quickly, by email even today if you want to. If we can get those in by August fifth, we can really move on this thing. In the meantime we can figure out who the panel members are, the panel members that NAFFDIPIR selects and who our USDA folks can be.

Does FNS have the information, and this could definitely be a direction you don't want to go, but do they have the information to be able to email the letter to the tribal letters rather than – I mean, in addition to mailing it for anybody that wanted to respond quickly?

I think so. Isn't that correct, Barbara?

Yes it is. We do have a listing of email addresses. The only concern is if that email address is up to date, but we do have an existing list.

Right.

And we'd be happy to do both. We can certainly email out the letter as well.

And you would copy the Food Distribution, direc- managers and directors?

Yes.

So, one way or another it would get there to the appropriate **INAUDIBLE**.

Right. I mean I don't – I'm not saying that's the way to go, I'm just wondering because of the time constraints if we wanted to – to use both methods.

Roxanne, I think you make a good point to reach out in as many ways as we can. Because of the time sensitivity.

Okay, right now that takes care of it. I'll keep listening and making notes. Thank you.

Thank you.

No further questions at this time.

This is Darlene Barnes again. I just want to make sure that people have a chance to continue to comment or any other questions during this period of time. We'll take a few minutes and again it's star one.

This is Bud Squirrel in the Cherokee Nation. I'm here because we're here to learn more than anything. It's good to hear the other people that have a little experience with it and in their opinions, you know, because it kind of forms what – the thoughts that I have about it. I've never experienced a pilot project before, and I'm here just to learn and to listen. I never learn a whole lot when I'm talking because I, you

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know, am limited in what I know. So I need to hear from all of you and let me know what you think, but my first – my first thought when I thought this – got this email just a couple of days ago – was can they do that for us. If we wanted something specific like venison, you know. We have ten thousand clients a month. Can they do that? Can they have a – I know that the Plains, the Mountain and Plains tribes, you know, they – they favor buffalo. We like it, too, you know, we like it, too, but I think our state if there was anything in the way of wild game was venison, you know, more than – more than buffalo where we came from. So that would be what we would be interested in, but we don't think it's really that, I don't know, workable, you know, because there's not that much available, you know, not very many venison farms, and probably maybe more expensive than buffalo. I don't know, we've not checked into it. But it's the sheer numbers that scared us you know. I think we would probably be more interested in working out where we could count on being able to give out turkeys at Christmas or turkeys at Thanksgiving, hams at Christmas or something like that, you know, in a pilot project. Something we could count on, you know, for one month's worth of turkeys and one month's worth of hams, or something like that. I know that's probably doable, but some of the other things that we would – we support any tribe that wants a pilot project and has a specific kind of food in mind. We're here to support everybody, but we – we're not – we're unsure about what we could ask for as the Cherokee Nation. Thank you.

Thank you, Bud, Cathie, do you have any comments to that about what you can or can't order or what you think would be doable?

Yeah. Thank you, Bud. It's, there is a lot to think about here, and we're going to be putting a big job on this panel as we put it together, but what I'm thinking about on the food package is that for the – at least for the pilot the fair game will be the, you know, the existing foods that we have, the hundred or so foods that are already nationally recognized as FDPIR foods. And then that we would be able to have some play room, you know, to build a couple of other things in. But that those things would have to go through the same vetting process that we've created on a national basis. So if you wanted to talk about adding, you know, say we went through this exercise with hominy a while back and somebody came forward and said we would like to add hominy to the package and it was researched and it was costed out and it was determined by the group that they wanted to move forward to include hominy in the package, the – I see a similar kind of process going for the region that is part of the pilot as – as new foods are considered, but Bud brings up a good point about how do you figure – you want to make sure that you consider things, or at least go through a thorough analysis of whether you can get them and if it's going to be five dollars a pound, what is that going to do to your analysis of the pilot versus the current system. So it's – it's going to be – I think it's very exciting, but I also want – I also want everybody to think as we move forward about how we do this and how we restructure it so that we have the best chance of success. So I think, you know, Bud's points are all well taken.

Thank you.

For folks on the phone, if you press star one, you'll be able to connect with us here, and we'll check with the operator. Operator, please –

Betty Graveen, your line is open.

This is Betty Graveen again. Just what Bud was saying about, you know, the programs that have thousands of people on their – on their case load, where a lot of those smaller tribes, except for Pat, in Menominee and Oneida, but the rest of us all have a few hundred participants. We used to have up to seven hundred but with the way the food stamp program is where you can buy anything you want, a lot of our younger people are, you know, taking that route, but we still, you know, maintain our clientele here and it's not very difficult for the smaller tribes to try to figure out, you know, what their need is. And it's all going to be the same – the majority of it's going to be the same food items anyway. So, I mean, that's – he made a very good point and that's because I think the larger tribes are going to have a hard time trying

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to figure out, you know, really what they should order from these private vendors, and I think those private vendors would – it would take some getting used to. That's just my thoughts on this. Thanks.

Thank you, Betty.

We have a question from Roxanna.

It's kind of a – not really a question, it's kind of a thought. As I look at the map and then I listen to some of the comments that are being made, I wonder if when we figure out who is – who's willing to participate in the project, if – there's a couple of things. One of them is if – whoever does this project vendor-wise is going to have to bid on this, is that correct?

Yes.

So perhaps we should have three or four cluster groups, because it's going to depend on where your vendor is, is that right?

Right.

And then the other thing is with the discussion, it seems like it would be really helpful if we did have a mix of large and small programs to see how does it affect them, and I – when you look at the map you could pull together a few groups, like if you had a – like a New Mexico, Arizona, Southern California, something in that area you could pull together a group. You could pull together some possibly out of Oklahoma and Kansas. And then you could maybe do a North/South Dakota, Minnesota, and then you possibly, depending on the distance you have, the northeast including Montana. So I don't know if that's something that we want to keep in mind and look at how do they – how do they cluster together and how would we actually work with whoever gets the contract.

Definitely. And that's why I like looking at that map that's included when you – if you haven't seen the attachments already, it gives you a sense there definitely are clusters around the country. If you're saying – I know that we won't have – we don't have enough money to try four or five different areas in our pilot, if that's what you're talking about, but I think we're probably only going to be able to grab a group.

Now what I'm saying is if we had four defined groups –

Um hmm.

That were willing to participate and we knew that, let's say it was, one of the groups was Navajo and Zuni and Acoma and whoever else is down here close in Arizona, and we had clearly defined groups, then when the bids went out, we could go back and look at which group logistically solves – solves in where it makes it possible for the vendor to serve them.

Right. Right. And as you say that, I'm thinking about who's on the phone and making sure that you, you know, talk to your – talk to your neighboring tribes, talk to – make sure that every – everybody – we want to be sure that everybody knows so that everybody who's interested comes forward because if one tribe in your – in your area says I do want to be a participant, but the other tribes, for whatever reasons don't let us know, it's not, you know, it's not – you're not going to see a grouping as the selection panel takes a look at who wants to play.

Good point. We will send out something after the – actually we should probably send out something before this next call on asking VPs to encourage anybody that was not on this call to participate in Thursday's call?

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Sure, I think that's a great idea. And in fact, if anybody is interested there's no reason – there's nothing to preclude you from jumping on the Thursday call, too. I'm going to be attending both.

Okay. We'll – we'll get something out and try to get it out to everyone.

Because for the people who are on the phone today, maybe you think about it for a day or two and, and we get back on the phone Thursday and you've thought about something that would be good for all of us to discuss, that just – that just helps us to have more things to put on the table.

Thank you, Cathie.

Thank you.

Next question is from Red Gates.

Good afternoon, everybody. Greetings from our Chairman. He – he's in a couple of other very important meetings, so he's asked me to represent the tribe here, and one of the things that his first concern was about, and also ours, but Roxanna kind of stole my thunder about these little groupings because we only, we know of only one or two major vendors that might be interested. My question is probably to Cathie, you probably know the history of the Midwest pilot. How many vendors showed an interest? How many vendors were involved? You selected Reinhart for the Midwest. How many other vendors showed interest?

Oh I'm glad – actually I'm glad you asked that, Red, because it reminds me of something else to reach out to the groups on the phones today and Thursday, but to answer your questions, I actually didn't arrive at Food and Nutrition Service until later on in those pilots when it was time to – they were just finishing, so I had to read up on the history and I don't know how many other vendors would have been interested. I do know that this went through the Department of Defense and Reinhart was their existing contractor. So I don't think, at least based on what I've read, I don't believe that they went out and solicited new vendors like we will this time. They just took –

Okay.

They just took an existing contract and built on it. And that at the time made sense. It was an easy thing to do. Now, another thing Farm Service Agency is on the phone and I know for the bigger – the re-competing of the bigger national contract, Linda and company, did you say you have about – I don't – there is about – they believe there are about fifty people who are interested. I don't know how many are realistically capable. Do you want to comment on that? Oh, I guess you'd have to call in and do your star one. Okay, so, I'm hoping that Kansas City will punch star one to make comments, but the third thing I wanted to say was that Red made me think about was if you know of vendors in your area that would be interested in getting in on this, we should be trying to collect that kind of information, too.

Yeah, that was my – my first concern. We don't have a large number of chain stores. I only know of one or two in our immediate area – excuse me – but I do know from – from my travels as being program director that we get to see other wholesalers or big grocery chain stores that in the larger, larger populated areas. But I get concerned about this out here in the middle of nowhere, and, you know, you mentioned earlier about the transportation costs in the past pilot, but that's – that would be my first concern and it was the Chairman's also, is, you know, we – we're very rural out here, and any time they bring food out onto the res in our area we – we pay a pretty penny for it. So we're concerned about how these vendors are going to be selected. Are they going to have to bid or are they going to just have to – you know, we're more concerned about the cost to the pilot so that it could really happen for everybody.

Me, too.

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With that, I don't have any other questions right now.

Thank you, Red.

Next question is from Mary from Spirit Lake.

I have a question – I might be sticking my neck out there, but I'm just wondering how feasible would it be to modify the regional food package to coincide with the prime vendor project?

I – I do see that happening, if I – if I understand your question correctly, I think that for – for the regional pilot that there will be its own little food package. I believe, you know, I would envision primarily the foods that the who nation gets but why not consider other things that your – that your regions finds – finds more attractive. I – I – one of the reasons I really want to get into this pilot and – and ideally go national with it, is I see this as making your food package more attractive for your program participants, and if you, you know, if you really want to compete, if you will, with – with this program, that is one way that I hope that this can do that.

Did that answer your question, Mary?

Yeah, I think it's a great idea and I'd like to see – I'd like to see some progress move towards that goal. We've – whoever's been on the food package know that the process has been lengthy and very time consuming and it seems like we're spinning our wheels, but if we go to regional food choices that the clients – that make the clients happier with what they're receiving, I think it could be done all at once.

I think that's an important part of what we need to test here.

Just like when we go to the grocery stores, we're not all mandated to buy the same products. I think our – our – our choices should be in abundance but still fall within the daily – recommended daily guidelines that we need to follow. But I think we can do a better job with that.

Me, too. And – and – in my head, I think if we've got a smaller outfit running – running the show for a smaller group, we can – we can reach – we can achieve that meeting – meeting, you know, what people want out of those foods within the dietary guidelines, but – but with – with more flexibility in the choices.

The next question is from Betty Graveen.

Okay. It's me again. In regards to the comments about the suppliers, I believe – was it Great Lakes Foods or US Foods, there were some other people that showed an interest in it and Reinhart got the bid for the – for our pilot program. And then there's also Sysco Foods is the national distributor. So there's was plenty of suppliers that I think would, you know, show an interest in that. And then – and I go back to my first comment there where it's going to stimulate the economy here, you know, by providing jobs and spreading the money out all over the country if we went to these suppliers. And in regards to the food package, too, I mean, those were good comments, you know, from Mary about what – how the food package looks, and that was some of my opening concerns was the way the cans are coming in. And I haven't been able to get chicken for about three months now. And I think those foods would be more readily available when they come through these distributors. And I know I'm – I know that the smaller tribes in the Midwest here are going to pursue that, going back to that pilot program. And a lot of it is nutrition and education that we're practicing here. I mean people are starting to cook with the right foods, and I mean it just takes a lot of effort on our part. Course we've been here for thirty-some years so we know, you know, what our participants want. But those were just some comments. I think I'm just about done for the day anyway, but I'm a hundred percent in support of this, of applying for this, and hopefully it will go – we can be of some help. So thank you.

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Thank you. We might take you up on that.

More than willing to help you guys out.

Thanks, Betty, for your comments.

Yep.

The next question is from Linda.

Hi. I thought you had a question for me, Cathie, and it was in reference to how many vendors we had sources sought. There were approximately fifty-six. And basically I was looking for small businesses, woman owned, service disabled, hub zones, eight eights and SDBs. And so there may be additional vendors out there also.

Linda, didn't you tell me, though, that that wasn't a very successful scouting on the – meeting all the contract – meeting all the, the outreach for the small business contractors, that most of the people that were viable vendors on your list right now are bigger?

No, the majority of the people that I – that sources sought from are small. I had two large vendors which I had submitted.

Yes. And – okay. Then that's good to know. But I want to be sure to stress to the group is that the important thing for the – for the tribes is that we're picking the best vendor, we're not – I want to stress that the, uh, the mission here is not to support a specific business group but to find the right vendor for the job.

Might also note that we were **INAUDIBLE** vendors doing a **INAUDIBLE** for a national warehouse. If and when we do the **INAUDIBLE** then we probably will get a different pool of interested parties.

Okay.

Okay.

Ready for the next question?

Yes.

Thank you. I believe the name – I'm not sure, is it Ritz?

Okay, next question?

Okay. The next question is from Red Gates.

Hello. Am I on?

Yes you are.

Okay, I forgot to ask the one question that was on my mind, and when you opened it up I believe I heard you say, Darlene, that the goal for getting it started is calendar 2012, is that correct?

Uh, yes it is.

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And I think I heard Cathie say it's being looked at for a one-year pilot project?

At a minimum. At least a year.

I guess that that would be my concern. I guess having been involved in some pilots before and also in – in some new programs here on our reservation, that sometimes one year is not long enough to really gather what you need to have. And I guess you all have to do plannings in your – planning in your jobs, and to me I really feel that one year might be just a little bit short. That's just my comment, so the question would be is there any chance that it would go longer than one year?

Yeah, I appreciate that thinking, too, Red. We all do. I would like to have as much time as we possibly can and ultimately I'm so hopeful that we can go national with this, but I can't – I don't want to promise something when I can't guarantee the – the money going for – I don't know what our money situation will be going forward.

Well I mentioned being involved in other pilots, and I know when we went with the fresh fruit and vegetable, as it was then called, fresh produce pilot, it – it went one year and then we added other programs slowly to the program, and as we all know it was very successful so that – that's where I get some of my, I guess, thinking from.

Let's hope this one goes just like that.

Right. Point well taken.

I do – I do – I do, too.

Thank you, Red.

And that – yeah, that's all I have.

Thank you.

We do have another question, the name is not recorded, so if you have a question your line is open. Please check your mute button.

Hello?

Hello.

Oh, hey, it's Peg from Red Cliff, and I was a big part of the vendor project before, and I tell you what, it was great. Not only did it bring in commercial labels, it – it increased our customers feeling good about the product. The biggest concern I think I'm looking at is do we have enough vendors out there to supply the food? Our vendor was really good. I mean, we were never without a product and if USDA needed to send like, maybe, canned beef or something that they couldn't get at that kind of a size, they worked with USDA and they got that. I'm just – it was too sad that it was so expensive, you know, because it was a great program. And I know when you start new programs it's scary, but, you know, we've, you know, you keep throwing new stuff at us and we – we've figured out and can do it. But I like it. I love the thought of going with a – a national vendor. I need to – I do the lunch program for the summer food and I have to get prices, but I tell you Reinhart and Sysco had to compete for my business and they were able to price up all the products so I'm thinking that maybe when you go to find vendors you can look at the costs that – that those stores charge. I mean, it wasn't hard for me to do all that. Can you hear me?

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Yes.

Oh, okay. And another part, in the food package review, I thought the regional people would just probably be looking at their region and finding their vendors and work with them like I know maybe ours might be wild rice and right now we're trying to get a vendor that will supply us enough to just do our region. Like each region, though, has their own regional foods so, um, I'm not sure where the food package review is in that but I thought it was a goal when I was meeting with them that if you had a product that you needed to just supply the vendor, so I'm not sure how that will work in this whole overall project, but I'll tell you what, the Midwest Region did this and it was a success. I just wish it didn't cost so much. And I hope that there's enough vendors out there that can supply the food to – I'm talking like – like Red says, remote, we're remote. I don't know if part of that was the cause because you had to go to Michigan, you had to go throughout all of Wisconsin, you know, so that I – I do worry about that because I'm not quite sure how every other region is located and how far away from the vendor are you going to be. The truck driver, like I said, they were refrigerated trucks. They were a lot better than what we're getting now. But I'm not saying there's nothing wrong with the way stuff is delivered cause it's – it's just my refrigeration has Styrofoam and then the rest of it is all out and sometimes my regular food comes a little frozen yet, or gets a little bit of – oh, I got somebody at my office. But that's all I wanted to say. I just want to let you know that I liked – I liked having commercial products and I like having that for my customers. So that's all I wanted to say.

Thank you.

I'm glad, Betty Jo and Peggy, I'm glad you're speaking up to the – the benefits of the last pilot, because I think we all need to be reminded. And also, you mentioned that Sysco and Reinhart are able to reach you, and so I'm thinking about – I don't know what their – what their span of service is, but in case you're talking to either one of them in the near future, maybe you want to that out there.

No further questions at this time.

Again this is Darlene Barnes. We'll take just a few more minutes in case there are more questions as people process some of the information that's been shared today. And again, as Roxanna mentioned and encouraged from Cathie as well, there is another consultation on Thursday and if you care to participate in that one again, you're certainly more than welcome to do so.

I can provide information about – while we're waiting – Thursday's consultation is July 21, Thursday, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time. That consultation session will be with Undersecretary Kevin Concannon of the consulting officials. You can find the information if you'd like to register, you don't have to but if you'd like to register you can find it on our website at www.fns.usda.gov/fns/tribal and the handouts are there. They'll be the same handouts that you have today. If you have any additional comments you can also email us. Our email address is tribalaffairs@fns.usda.gov. And as a last update for that consultation, we'll be using the same conference line as you did today, and I'll go ahead and share that with you again. The number is 1-888-455-4787 and the pass code is 7701777#. So it's the same information that you used today to join the consultation session that's going to be held this Thursday, July 21, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time.

This is Bud Squirrel again. I'd like to make a comment about \INAUDIBLE\ food nutrition programs ten years now.

Excuse me, Bud, could you \INAUDIBLE\ closer to the microphone, we're having a hard time hearing on the phone. Thank you.

Okay. You need me to start over?

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Please.

Okay. When I first came on board with the Cherokee Nation that was approximately ten years ago, and I believe the pilot project was just now, you know, being phased out at that time, and I keep hearing the good things about it, and that's good to know, but I also want to say with the system that we've got now, as the people that deliver to us, you know, it's gotten steadily better over the years. You know when I first started there were problems with it but these have been worked on and phased out over the years to where now we don't have very many issues with the people that deliver to us, you know, with the – in the last couple of years, you know, where you can order, you know, and then get your food just a week later, you know, seven to ten days later. It's worked out real well. We used to have to keep, you know, nine months up to, you know, twelve to fifteen months worth of food in our warehouse, and now we don't have to cause we're pretty sure, we're ninety-nine percent certain that we're going to get restocked, you know, within ten days of ordering. So the system has gotten better in my experience during the years that I've been there, so I do have to say that about the vendors that we have now. Thank you.

We do have a couple questions now, do you want to take them?

Yes.

Thank you. Sam Spang, your line is open.

Yes, I was just wondering with the implementation of this pilot project, are we going to be still using the webscom system to order food or are we going to be going to like a new system that's been set up by the vendors?

Good question. It's on our list of things that we have to figure out. It probably will depend on the setup of the vendor, and we would have to make modifications to our web base system if we were going to accommodate a different buying system. Because if you – if you – going through my simple brain to try to explain it, um, the orders now go in through the web based system to – to us and then USDA makes the purchases, but if we have a regional vendor who's actually making the buying, we would have to basically reroute those orders to the vendor to make the purchases. So the question will be, is it worth the time and expense to reroute the web based orders or should we just have the vendor use its own system. Thanks for asking that.

The next question is from Pat Roberts.

Hello?

Hi Pat.

I guess let me start off with on the last – with the reinvention, they called it, of food distribution, Sherry Perry and I sat on the panel of people that – that worked on this and suggested the pilot project, and yes, we did have a lot of people that were interested. Matter of fact DOD was a separate bidder with Reinhart and Sysco and other people that bid on the project. And Reinhart did have the lowest prices at the time. So I guess I just wanted to get that clarified and just state that it was a wonderful program, just like Peggy says, and I agree with Betty and Mary and, you know, that the program, I mean, we should have – it was a great program. I think the biggest problem with the way we have it now is the items that we're out of that the people want and we can't get them. Tuna. Chicken. I mean, those are items that are favorites for people making meals with and feeding their families on healthy foods, and it's a – it's a lot when you have to tell people no, I'm sorry, we're not able to order that, they don't have it in the warehouse. And why not? Well, we can't answer that, you know. We can't tell them it's a buying problem. We do, but it's really hard. It's really hard to tell people, I'm sorry we can't help you with that, we don't have that available for you. And yet food stamp people can go and get any of it no matter what price it is. It's – I'm

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glad to hear we're going – going to try another pilot project. I would love to be part of that pilot project because I very much liked what we received and how we received it and the timeliness and everything being available all the time.

Pat, thank you. This is Cathie.

Yes.

I'm gla – you know, because I was not here when this – when the pilot was formulated and because you were on the team, I hope we can pick your brain about – some more about how that process worked so we can make sure we can build this one as best we can.

Yes, I know everything was considered.

Okay, good. And, um, and let me comment, too, on the – on the, uh, I agree with you, it's for hard for – I understand it's hard for you folks to look people in the eye and say the chicken is not available and people not understand that USDA was not able to make the purchase. I get that. If it were in the case of tuna, I was thinking about that when you said that, one of our – one of our requirements for food distribution on Indian reservations as well as all of our other commodity programs is that we buy American, that we buy domestic origin, and the tuna, for example, the problem there has been there's no – there was one, one vendor, and I think he got out, right?

Well, no, they've got a problem with FDA and they can't produce any further tuna for us until they –

So there was – there was – there was one vendor that was able to get us the tuna that's American tuna, and he is having problems with Food and Drug Administration now so he's not available, so that left us with nobody. But that – that kind of thing could happen whether it's Reinhart or USDA or Sysco or whomever.

Hello?

Hello.

Anybody there?

Yes, we're here.

Oh, well I was finished. I just didn't know. Everything went silent.

Oh, sorry, Pat.

Okay.

Sorry. I guess I didn't say thank you and stop talking.

Anything else Pat?

No, that was it.

Okay, thank you.

Our next question, your line is open. If you have a question, your line is open.

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Yes, I do have a question. This is Chairman Maulson, Lac du Flambeau. Hello?

Yes. Yes, sir.

Yeah, I got – got some questions in reference to not only the things that you all are doing already, but I don't know if your organization can take a look at what the tribes have to offer reference to us working with different tribes out there. I mean I use – I asked Betty if you guys are looking at the wild rice or are we looking at fish that comes from our Great Lakes. We've got tribes that do fishing, fishery. Is there anything that, you know, other than Commodities or the Food Distribution Program that can take a look at what the tribes are doing across country in their area of producing, you know, for these here type of programs. And I don't know if you all do that or not, but I did come in late, but maybe someone can answer that question or maybe we can look into that question.

And – and your reference is to being able to – producing your own foods, etc., or – or more like from a production standpoint, from an agriculture production standpoint? Like –

Well, right. I says – I mean I don't want to be disrespectful or sound racist, but, you know, a lot of non-Indian people don't really, you know, understand, you know, the culture of different tribes out there that sustain, you know, the things that we do. Walleyes, and the fishery in our areas is part of our life, and I guess, you know, those are the type of things that is there an opportunity to make a look at making something like that happen out there at the federal level and working with tribes because we want to put our people to work, too, and this is one way of doing it.

I think that's a good point, and, Cathie, I don't know, with your experience with USDA and other program areas, your thoughts might be on that?

I have several thoughts on that, and thank you, Chairman, for bringing that up. We did talk about it a little bit earlier, but I wanted to say specifically about walleye, that's my favorite fish so I would love to be able to accommodate that. I think one of the benefits of this regional concept is that we could get to a place where we could pull from Native American vendors through this contractor. So for wild rice, or walleye, or whatever it would be in your particular regions, what I would like to see, the ideal, I think, is that we – we are able to source some of that food from Native American vendors. I mean I think that would be the absolute best thing that could happen out of this.

Well, all I do is just encourage, you know, whoever out there is listening, but to, you know, make an effort to see if that can be done. I know I'm the chairman of our Voight Task Force, as we call it here in the Midwest and the Treaty areas, but we've talked about this many of times of using, you know, the products that the different tribes have, you know, for, like say, for instance, casinos. I mean, the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife, you know, the Lake tribes, they can get the whitefish, and there's no reason why we couldn't have fresh whitefish in those particular areas. Or even for our elders or for our food distribution. As a matter of fact, they've donated fresh whitefish to this year's distribution program right here in Lac du Flambeau.

Shrink wrap.

And they were all shrink wrapped and gone through the proper process, so I guess we can do it, and I'm just sort of figuring out how we can move that further down the road.

What I would imagine is – and I don't, you know, I don't know that this can work for a fact but I sure want to try it, but what I would imagine is so you have a – we get a regional vendor in place, and that group figures out – the group that's going to be serviced by this regional vendor – sits down and figures out what foods they want in the package, and say they want – say they want walleye as a part of the

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package. So they go through their process, and they'll probably have to help the vendor be able to source that walleye from – from whomever has it. But I just think that would be terrific.

You know, we talk about venison, or deer meat as we call it, as part of our diet here in Waswagoning and Lac du Flambeau, and I know that every family on this reservation, you know, goes out – goes out and takes care of that and extra meat goes to some of the elders. And I know that we have deer farms out there, red deer farms. And I guess what's more – what's more quality in reference to our animals that are in our woods. So I guess, you know, there are just – I get excited when I – when I hear maybe opportunities out there when, you know, different people in different levels can help make this happen, so I'm encouraged, I'd like to be a party to, you know, if it happens out there, give – give Betty Jo here, our Director of our food distribution program, a call so we can be a party to, you know, see if we can do things like that.

Sounds good.

Thank you, Chairman Maulson.

Thank you guys. I appreciate listening, and I don't know if I made any sense or not but I'm going to keep talking about what I'm saying.

You made a lot of sense and we appreciate your input.

Thank you very much.

We have no other questions.

Again, this is Darlene Barnes, the consulting official for today's consultation. I'll wait – I'll ask one more time if there are any more comments or questions and again remind you that you can participate on Thursday if you care to participate in the second consultation on the regional vendor pilot. With that, I think I'm going to go ahead and wrap up. It doesn't appear that there are any more comments or questions at this time. Again, I just want to say thank you and also state again that USDA does take its consultation obligations very seriously. We know this, again, was short notice and so we appreciate you being able to participate today on something that is, I think, very important to the tribes and to USDA and we look forward to continue to work with you as we move forward on this pilot. Thank you all very much.