



ORGANIZATIONAL INTRODUCTION

IAC was founded in 1987 to pursue and promote the conservation, development, and use of our agricultural resources for the betterment of our people. Tribal leaders, in a true expression of self-determination, identified and delegated their representation within the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) Charter, comprising the voting membership that remains in existence today. This organizational leadership structure uniquely positions the IAC to inform policy and USDA programmatic implementation, simultaneously redefining and rebuilding our self-determined Tribal food systems.

The plight of the 1980's Farm Crisis, magnified by unprecedented natural disasters, Indian producers were five times more likely to face bankruptcy than the US national average. Indian producers were disproportionately impacted by a financial system designed to fail them and were categorically excluded from federal emergency aid and most USDA commodity and conservation programs. In recognition of the vital role agriculture plays in the Indian community, and in response to requests from Tribal leaders, Congress passed Public Law 99-190 with Amendment #1404 in December 1985. This amendment provided an appropriation of \$6M for the purchase of hay and its transportation to Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota to mitigate national disaster drought impacts on Indian Reservations by maintaining livestock herds. The Act directed the Secretary of the Interior to report to Congress on the use of the drought relief and the difficulties faced in Indian agriculture. The 1986 report presented nine recommendations. The first recommendation was to establish a commission similar to the Intertribal Timber Council on a national/regional level for agriculture and rangeland. This concept later led to the formation of the IAC.

The 1986 Report to Congress did not address all of Indian Country, only the area which received the drought money. However, the 1986 report did recommend a continuation of the hearing process on a regional basis to obtain testimony from Tribes not included in the report. The Secretary of Interior appointed 12 Indian leaders and 6 BIA employees to the National Indian Agriculture Working Group. Their charge was to prepare a report that addressed all of Indian Country's agricultural issues. The National Indian Agriculture Working Group held 14 public hearings across Indian Country, and they used these testimonies to prepare their recommended actions.

These hearings culminated in the "Final Findings and Recommendations of the National Indian Agriculture Working Group" from their last meeting on November 16, 1987. The Charter Convention convened, and the report was presented on November 17, 1987, with 32 recommendations to improve agricultural conditions and support Tribal goals in Indian Country. This adjourned the working group.

On November 18, 1987, the Convention was divided into caucus groups, where they discussed the terms and conditions of the charter and elected representatives for the Executive Board. Greg Smitman, the author of the 1986 and 1987 reports, became the first IAC Executive Director. He was joined by Congressional Working group appointees Robert Miller, President, and Fred Smith, Vice President. On November 19, 1987, the 87 Tribes who were gathered in Las Vegas, Nevada, officially formed the Intertribal Agriculture Council.

The IAC promotes the Indian-use of Indian resources for the benefit of Indian People. Programmatic offerings have expanded over nearly four decades to include legal and policy development, USDA technical assistance, natural resources management, domestic and international marketing support, and Native youth in food and agriculture leadership development. Informed by the trade routes and food systems that existed on this continent before colonization, IAC seeks to address systemic inequities to better serve Native producers and Indian Country as a whole.