

**STATEMENT by Patrick O’Toole, President  
On behalf of the  
FAMILY FARM ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
in support of**

**Universal Access to Reliable, Clean Drinking Water for Native Americans  
April 9, 2021**

The Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) Board of Directors at its April 9, 2021 joint meeting with the Alliance Advisory Committee, took formal action in support of the provision of reliable, clean drinking water to meet the domestic needs of Western Native American communities. The Alliance recognizes that providing access to reliable, clean drinking water through federal investments in water infrastructure, coupled with developing the technical, managerial, and financial capacity to operate and maintain that infrastructure, is an essential component of the Federal trust responsibility to Native Americans. Alliance President Patrick O’Toole, a sheep and cattle rancher from Wyoming, issued the following statement on behalf of the Board of Directors in support of the Colorado River Water and Tribes Initiative:

“The Family Farm Alliance represents farmers, ranchers, irrigation and water districts, and allied industries in the 17 Western States. On February 8, 2021, our Board of Directors finalized priorities for the coming year. One of those priorities was seeking to work with Western Native Americans to find solutions that lead to “win-win” successes for irrigated agriculture and the rural farming, ranching and tribal communities in the West. Our Board believes that working with Native Americans, particularly in agricultural areas, will undoubtedly contribute to economic recovery in those areas.”

The Alliance supports the important work started by the Colorado River Water and Tribes Initiative (Initiative) to bring attention to the lack of access to clean drinking water in Indian country. The initiative was launched to both educate the public about the lack of this basic service that most Americans take for granted and make real, tangible progress on the ground. While the Alliance is not advocating for any particular interest or outcome associated with the Initiative, we strongly support its intent to enhance the capacity of tribes and to advance sustainable water management through collaborative decision-making.

The Alliance recognizes the sovereignty of the states to administer and distribute the waters of each state and that adjudication of Indian water rights occurs through state water rights adjudications, and strongly supports the negotiated settlement of Indian water rights claims in those adjudications. The development of drinking water infrastructure for Native American communities is often included in the settlement of Indian water rights claims and can create regional partnerships that are key to sustainable water management.

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The Family Farm Alliance supports the provision of reliable, clean drinking water to meet the domestic needs of Native American communities and recognizes that providing access to reliable, clean drinking water through water infrastructure, coupled with developing the technical, managerial, and financial capacity to operate and maintain that infrastructure, is an essential component of ensuring that our Native American communities are successful into the future.

Access to reliable, clean drinking water is an essential human need that is critical to the public health, well-being, educational attainment, and economic development of all communities in the West. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Native American communities in rural areas due in part to lack of access to safe running water and has provided a stark reminder that access to reliable, clean drinking water is a matter of life or death for all citizens of the Western United States. The Family Farm Alliance urges Federal agencies and Tribal governments to coordinate and work collaboratively with appropriate State and local jurisdictions to establish expedited planning, design, development, and operation of infrastructure necessary to provide reliable, affordable, and clean drinking water for Native American communities in accordance with applicable law.”

**Approved by Family Farm Alliance Board of Directors, April 9, 2021**