



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Budget and Finance Committee receives agriculture project update report from Many Farms Chapter**

**MANY FARMS, Ariz.** – Last week, the Budget and Finance Committee received an update from Many Farms Chapter regarding the Many Farms Agricultural Project, which was approved by the Navajo Nation Council in April 2016 as part of the Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan. The project seeks to revitalize the farming industry within the community of Many Farms, which is located approximately 15-miles north of Chinle.

Projects included in the Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan seek to increase economic, community, and agricultural development throughout the Navajo Nation. The funding for the expenditure plan is derived from the accrued income, or interest, earned from the Navajo Nation's Permanent Trust Fund's principal balance.

The report was presented by Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), Many Farms Chapter, Many Farms Land Board, the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, and the Department of Agriculture.

Delegate Begay said the intention of the meeting was to obtain guidance from the BFC members to revise the Many Farms Agricultural Project's expenditure plan so that it would reflect the interests of the local farmers.

"At this time we have not been able to draw down funding because the Office of the President and Vice President chose to support the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources' proposed agricultural plan for this community, however, the local farmers would like to begin utilizing the funds to begin farming," said Delegate Begay.

He added that the chapter and farmers understand the department's reasoning to assess soil samples and conduct a feasibility study before farming commences, adding that the local farmers have cultivated the land in the area for many generations and do not see the need to wait for the feasibility study.

The Many Farms Agricultural Project received nearly \$3 million in FY2017, and will receive an additional \$1.5 million in FY2020 to complete the cultivation and water project. It would aid in

assessing proposed land areas for farming, and to rehabilitate water dams and irrigation systems for the farms.

BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) expressed his continued support for the project, and said the conflicting issues between the community of Many Farms and the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources needs to be addressed immediately.

“When we worked on the PTF income expenditure plan, this is one initiative we put on there because Delegate Begay brought us out here. We were amazed that water was coming out of the ground and that inspired us to want to help this community and get these funds,” said Delegate Damon. “When we looked at this plan initially, our budget was overlooked because OPVP considered their budget a more realistic plan. If you want to have a sit-down with the OPVP, I am more than welcome to assist in that process.”

Delegate Damon said there are other options the community can consider that does not hold them to OPVP’s plan for their agriculture project, but recommended a directive to hold a leadership meeting with OPVP, Department of Water Resources, Department of Agriculture, Many Farms Chapter, and the Many Farms Farm Board, to decide how to best move forward with the project that will benefit the farmers.

BFC member Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) said the committee supports the agricultural project for economic development reasons, and to reconnect the community to its “historical roots” as a traditional farming area.

“Farming requires a Navajo view, Navajo language, and Navajo perspective for it to be successful. Without our land base, we cannot sustain our way of life, and without language, we can’t sustain our culture. These play an important part in farming, ranching, schools, and our ceremonies. This is an attempt to revitalize the language and our culture within our communities through traditional farming. If you look at it from that level, that’s what we are trying to do here,” said Delegate Chee.

Delegate Chee added that in the Northern Navajo Agency area he represents, they have begun plans to increase agricultural projects, focusing on the Navajo people’s connection to the land and Diné culture.

BFC members voted 3-0 to accept the report, with one directive to hold the leadership meeting to propose amendments to the Many Farms Agricultural Project’s expenditure plan, which will be announced at a later date.

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