



December 11, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
Biden-Harris Transition Team
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20270

Re: Farm Aid Support for Nominating Janie Simms Hipp to Serve as Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

President-elect Biden and Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris:

On behalf of Farm Aid, congratulations on your election. As you and your team are preparing for the transition at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with Secretary Tom Vilsack to Build Back Better in America, we believe that having a strong Deputy Secretary with a command of the Department's mission and deep knowledge of its programs is essential. We believe there is no better candidate to serve as Secretary Vilsack's Deputy Secretary than Janie Simms Hipp, J.D., LL.M., and we offer our endorsement for her nomination to this position.

We ask for your consideration in making the historic appointment because Janie, as a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, represents America's first farmers and she is uniquely qualified with the depth of expertise necessary to work across the Department's mission areas and agencies to help build our nation's agricultural and rural economies. As a Native American woman with more than 35 years of experience in the field working with all producers from all walks of life, we believe that she is prepared to protect and represent the interests of all of our farmers and ranchers through the current pandemic and beyond; and to address the issues of racial equity and access to USDA programs and services.

Janie is an expert in all facets of the agriculture sector; from food law and policy, trade, credit and finance, ag business, risk management, federal nutrition programs, research and education, and rural development. With over seven years of experience at the Department in various capacities, including working closely with Secretary Vilsack as Senior Advisor for Tribal Relations and Director of the Office of Tribal Relations, she knows USDA inside and out like a farmer knows their tractor. Janie can help build it back using every tool in the shed to get it running better than ever.

With her strong ties to individual farmers, ranchers, agricultural finance, crop insurance industries, food sovereignty and local foods movements, farm organizations, and agricultural producers of color, Janie understands the entirety of the food system from field to fork. She knows what our Nation's food producers go through to feed the world and how to help them.

Janie is also a visionary in regenerative and climate sensitive agricultural practices. We cannot effectively address climate change without empowering our farmers and ranchers and look to integrate climate change solutions across all of USDA. As Deputy Secretary, Janie will help us get there by using her skills as a coalition builder to develop a broad range of support and relationships centered on adopting climate-focused initiatives.

She also understands the inner workings of the federal food assistance programs and is an advocate for modernizing those programs in new ways that link food producers more directly with those who are experiencing food insecurity. A connect that is even more essential today.

As one of the biggest advocates for youth and beginning farmers and ranchers, Janie understands that we are at a moment of intergenerational shift in agriculture and that our new and beginning farmers and ranchers need approaches that ensure they can join the sector and remain throughout their lives and careers. With her dedication of over two decades within the land grant system, she knows the importance of having a strong agriculture research, extension of knowledge, and new partnerships and approaches to support our producers.

Finally, Janie knows the challenges facing rural communities because she has seen them firsthand and has never forgotten her roots growing up in a small, rural southeastern Oklahoma town that was agriculture-dependent and infrastructure-poor. She planted her professional and home roots firmly in Arkansas and has traveled the country to help farmers and ranchers throughout her entire career. Janie knows where the cell phone service drops and broadband does not connect. She knows which communities do not have running water, sewer, or electricity. She knows where people depend on food assistance while seeing food being grown across the road. She knows what people in rural areas go through to run a small business and make ends meet. Janie grew up there, lives there, and serves the people there.

Janie has sat across the kitchen table to help farmers and ranchers during some of their most difficult times, like the farm financial crisis of the 1980s, and also at tables at USDA, Congress, and the White House working with lawmakers to tackle the most difficult issues facing America's food producers at the national-level. With her unparalleled passion, heart, experience, and intelligence, Janie will help Secretary Vilsack ensure that USDA is at the forefront of Building Back Better in America, and that everyone has a seat at the table and voice in effort.

Farm Aid has worked with Janie Hipp since our first days in 1985. As an organization committed to standing with all farmers and to keeping a diversity of farmers on the land, we believe that there is no one more qualified to be Deputy Secretary of USDA and to meet the moment we are facing in our country. President-elect Biden and Vice-President-elect Harris, please make history and finally appoint a representative of America's first farmers to represent all of America's farmers at the highest levels in agriculture – nominate Janie Simms Hipp to be the first Native American woman to serve as Deputy Secretary of the USDA.

Sincerely,



Willie Nelson, President



Carolyn Mugar, Executive Director