



## THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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# Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., expresses appreciation, support for delegation, NAPI trade agreement with Cuba

## *Agreement is another step forward for Navajo Nation sovereignty*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., has congratulated the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry general manager and board of directors for achieving a trade agreement with Cuba to sell Navajo grain to the island country.

“What it means to the Navajo Nation is revenues,” President Shirley said. “It means jobs. It means economic development. And I want to applaud Tsosie Lewis and the ones working with the NAPI program for reaching out.”

During a New Mexico Agriculture Trade Mission to Cuba, Navajo Agricultural Products Industry signed an historic letter of intent to sell products for consumption in Cuba with Alimport, Cuba's state food purchasing agency. The delegation to Cuba included NAPI General Manager Tsosie Lewis and U.S. Rep. Tom Udall.

“We are very pleased to return home with a letter of intent between NAPI and Alimport providing for the purchase of yellow corn, wheat, apples, onions, pinto beans and other New Mexico grown products,” Rep. Udall said in a press release. “This agreement could mean millions of dollars for Native Americans in New Mexico.”

Mr. Lewis said NAPI was honored that its products will help feed the Cuban people. Under provisions of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000, Alimport is allowed to negotiate the purchase of agriculture products directly from U.S. suppliers on a cash-only basis paid in advance by Cuba.



**NAPI General Manager Tsosie Lewis**

“There are grandmas and grandpas over there. They have to eat,” the President said. “There’s nothing illegal about dealing with Cuba as far as selling food items.”

President Shirley said this trade agreement is another step forward for Navajo Nation sovereignty and its current policy of reaching out.

“I think that is the most important thing that is happening with this agreement,” the President said. “Of course, it has already happened with the country of Mexico and now with the country of Cuba. The recognition of the Navajo Nation as a nation, a nation within a nation, that’s just the way it should be.”

“We’re a sovereign nation and we need to do everything we can to get back on our own two feet,” he said.

NAPI now sells millions of tons of beans to Mexico, Mr. Lewis said.

The trade embargo has exceptions for agricultural goods paid for in cash and Cuba has purchased more than \$1 billion in U.S. food since 2002, mainly corn, wheat, rice, chicken and soy products.

The President offered his thanks to Congressman Udall and U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman for their help in bringing about this agreement to help the Navajo Nation.

'I wholeheartedly support what Congressmen Udall is doing for the NAPI program," he said.

"Cuba is a market of 11.5 million people who need to eat like the rest of us," said Rep. Udall. "Cuba has paid over \$1.8 billion to purchase American food products since the passage of the TSRA."

The President said this is not the first international agreement the Navajo Nation has signed. In November 2005, it became a member of OCCAM – the Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communication – a United Nations non-governmental organization to help indigenous nations around the world develop a wireless telecommunications network like the one that exists on Navajoland.

Last week, the Navajo Nation agreed to help six Brazilian Indigenous nations develop a wireless network for which Brazil will pay the Navajo Nation \$25 million, he said.

*“Sovereignty is the most important thing that is happening with this agreement.”*

– President Joe Shirley, Jr.

“There are indigenous nations out there very interested in copycatting the wireless technology communications network that we put in place here on Navajoland,” he said.

"This is a great opportunity for NAPI and other New Mexico farmers who have long sought opportunities to sell their products in new markets. I am hopeful the work done during this trip will continue to grow into fruitful relationship between the Cuban people," Rep. Udall said.

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