



**MONTANA  
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FEDERATION**

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The Honorable Jon Tester  
United States Senate  
311 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC. 20002

July 10, 2023

Dear Senator Tester,

The Montana Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) thanks and applauds you for your leadership and persistence on developing the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) Water Settlement Act of 2023 (S. 1987). After more than twenty years of negotiating and bringing parties together to work toward this critical settlement, achievement of this task should be celebrated!

As previously mentioned, negotiating agreements on this scale is no simple task, but finalizing this last Indian Water Rights Settlement in Montana is of utmost importance to farmers and ranchers in the state as we move toward final adjudication. Furthermore, passage of your legislation will avoid costly litigation which would otherwise occur between FBIC, the federal government, and water users such as irrigators. As the state's largest general agriculture organization representing farmers and ranchers from all over the state including the hi-line, it is incredibly important to us that farmers have long term certainty about one of their most important resources; water. This legislation provides them with just that.

Additionally, this legislation will provide \$300 million for Milk River Project infrastructure repairs and to restore the St. Mary's canal, which our members have been asking for since 2004. This project provides irrigation to hundreds of individual farms and more than 100,000 acres of farmland. In recent years, it has become apparent that repairs and maintenance are absolutely imperative but the funds necessary to make them a reality have been difficult to secure. Improving the project will not only benefit farmers and citizens living in the area, but also the economy of the entire state.

Again, MFBF appreciates your efforts to settle this agreement. Agriculture is still Montana's number one economic driver and as a semi-arid state, access to irrigation water is critical for our continued success. Thank you for sponsoring the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Settlement Act of 2023. We hope to see it cross the finish line in Congress as soon as possible, so that we are one step closer to a final decree and ultimate protection of all Montana water rights.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Johnson  
President

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