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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe receives \$9.6 million grant for land management improvements to adapt to limited water supply

The grant comes from the NRCS and will support the implementation of irrigation modernization strategies to improve water use efficiency and drought resiliency.

Towaoc, Colorado — October 29, 2024 — The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT) has received a \$9.6 million grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement projects that address prolonged drought conditions and severely limited water supply. When completed, the system improvements funded by the grant will enhance irrigation efficiency by a projected 32%, increase access to water, and support UMUT farming and ranching operations. This project will advance UMUT’s agricultural operations by adapting to a future with less water.

The implementation of these conservation practices will improve the lives and livelihoods of UMUT tribal members by ensuring a reliable water supply to sustain the economic viability of the Farm & Ranch Enterprise's Tribal ranches. “The 109 center pivot sprinklers that irrigate the farm were installed 20-30 years ago,” says **Manuel Heart, Chairman of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe**. “The RCPP award will replace the last 48 worn out pivots, install moisture probes, and upgrade telemetry to support an irrigation scheduling program that will provide the right amount of water to each pivot for each crop. Irrigation improvements will be coupled with the ongoing introduction of water saving crops. This award is a result of the strong Federal, State and NGO partnerships and relationships that have made this important step forward possible. The Tribe appreciates this vital support and we look forward to working with our partners to keep our Tribal Farm viable in the face of climate change.”

“The Ute Mountain Ute have shown exactly what this program can be: a lifeline during drought and a path to make every drop of water stretch as far as it can,” said **Senator Hickenlooper**. “This \$9 million will help them go even farther.” The project is made possible through the

collaboration of several key partners working alongside the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, from project development to completion. The Colorado Water Conservation Board and Walton Family Foundation provided generous support for project development. Partner contributions from The Nature Conservancy, Dolores Water Conservancy District, Colorado Ag Water Alliance, and Farmers Conservation Alliance will provide an additional \$1.2 million for technical assistance and implementation of conservation practices.

Senator Bennet also remarked on the significance of this investment, saying, “Last month, I visited the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe’s Farm and Ranch Enterprise near Towaoc to learn more about their operation. I commend Chairman Heart and the Farm and Ranch team for their leadership to become more resilient in the face of a hotter, drier future. I’m pleased they will receive over \$9 million from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This funding will help them tackle the Western water crisis through irrigation efficiency improvements that will save over 7,000 acre-feet of water annually. I look forward to continuing to support their work.”

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe will manage the project together with Farmers Conservation Alliance and NRCS-certified technical service providers. “We have a strong partnership with Farmers Conservation Alliance and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal community,” says **Clint Evans, State Conservationist for the NRCS in Colorado**. “This agreement will be a continuation of those efforts, and we’re excited for it. This RCPP agreement will fund NRCS practices that target the conservation benefit that can substantially improve irrigation efficiency and water resources needed as a result of insufficient water and drought.”

“Project funding to improve drought resiliency in the Colorado River Basin is vital to sustaining local communities in the face of climate change,” said **Becky Mitchell, Colorado Commissioner to the Upper Colorado River Commission**. “This kind of support is especially important for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, who’ve experienced funding inequities around water projects.” **Julie Davies O’Shea, Executive Director of the Farmers Conservation Alliance**, adds “We are excited about the partnerships that have come together to support this project and the opportunity they have created to take this step towards greater resiliency for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.”

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About Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's Reservation of approximately 900 square miles (600,000 acres) lies in southwest Colorado, southeast Utah and northwest New Mexico. Towaoc, Colorado is the main tribal population center and the location of the tribal headquarters. The Tribe's current enrollment is approximately 2,100 members with the current population on the Colorado portion of the Reservation at approximately 1,700 residents, most of whom are enrolled members of the Tribe. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Farm & Ranch Enterprise is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Tribe.

About Farmers Conservation Alliance

Farmers Conservation Alliance is a 501c3 nonprofit social enterprise. In partnership with rural communities, we are tirelessly in pursuit of water management solutions that benefit both agriculture and the environment. Since 2005, we have amassed trusted relationships through our hands-on, solutions-oriented approach with farmers and rural communities. Those relationships have built a deep understanding of the challenges and benefits associated with the process of irrigation modernization. Our Irrigation Modernization Program creates a path forward for irrigation communities to upgrade their infrastructure, saving water and operating costs, while restoring streams, protecting fish, and generating green, renewable energy.