

Attn: Farm Bill

July 10, 2012

Dear Representative:

Creating jobs in rural America and ensuring the success of the next generation of farmers are national priorities. The Farm Bill's Rural Development title, which authorizes essential grants and loan programs targeted at leveraging local initiatives to spur growth and opportunity in rural areas, is critical to advancing both of these priorities. We applaud Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson for their tireless leadership in moving ahead with reauthorization of the Farm Bill. However, the chairman's mark dramatically reduces critical investments in rural economic development and misses the opportunity to make important policy changes that will improve these programs for rural people, places and businesses.

Since 1996, Congress has provided an average of \$413 million per farm bill in mandatory funding for the Rural Development title. The current draft House bill includes only \$50 million in mandatory funding and cuts authorization levels by \$1.5 billion over five years, which represents a 66 percent cut in mandatory funding and 50 percent cut in authorization levels.

We urge you to correct this deficiency by supporting amendments during mark up that will reinstate mandatory funding for the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program and the Water/Wastewater Backlog. We also ask that you work to protect the \$50 million in the mark for the Value Added Producer Grant program. The Senate passed bill maintains mandatory funding for all three of these successful Rural Development programs.

The Senate bill also includes bipartisan and common sense policy changes to rural development programs which make authorizing language clearer, simpler and more effective for rural people, businesses and places. The chairman's mark provides two important policy changes that will simplify application forms and improve program metrics, but we urge you to support amendments that will make broader bipartisan policy amendments found in the Senate bill. Specifically, we support provisions which will allow USDA to focus resources on strategic community and economic development plans on a multijurisdictional basis and a new technical assistance authority for the Essential Community Facilities Program.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We strongly encourage you to reach out and work with other interested colleagues prior to markup. By ensuring policy improvements and continued investments in rural economic development, we can ensure that the Farm Bill is a "jobs" bill that underpins and enables economic growth in rural communities throughout America. We look forward to working together on this important matter for American agriculture and America's rural communities.

Sincerely,

Caldwell County Greater Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)

American Planning Association  
American Public Works Association  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
Art of Regional Change  
Art of the Rural  
Association of Rural Communities in Texas  
California Center for Rural Policy  
California FarmLink  
Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin  
Center for Rural Affairs  
Community Food Security Coalition  
Corporation for Enterprise Development  
Dakota Rural Action  
Delta Land & Community  
disAbility Resource Center, Charleston, SC  
Double Edge Theatre - The Farm Center  
Ecological Farming Association  
Farmers Market Coalition  
Food System Economic Development  
FRESHFARM Markets  
HomeCorps  
Homestead Affordable Housing, Inc  
Hoopa Valley Tribe  
Housing Assistance Council  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
League of Rural Voters  
Llano Grande Center for Research and Development  
Maine Rural Partners  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance  
Midwest Assistance Program, the Midwest RCAP  
Milan MOVERS  
Minnesota Housing Partnership  
National Association of Counties  
National Association of Development Organizations  
National Association of Regional Councils  
National Association of Towns and Townships  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
National Grange  
National League of Cities  
National Network of Forest Practitioners  
National Rural Health Association  
National Rural Housing Coalition  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

Natural Capital Investment Fund, Inc.  
New England Farmers Union  
New Mexico Community Development Loan Fund  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Inc. (NOFA-NY)  
Paradox Community Trust  
Partners for Rural America  
PathStone Corporation  
PCC Farmland Trust  
Redwood Coast Rural Action  
Rice University  
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural  
Rural Community Assistance Corporation  
Rural Community Assistance Partnership  
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative  
School Food FOCUS National Office  
Sierra Business Council  
Sustainable Northwest  
The Carsey Institute  
The Conservation Fund's Resourceful Communities Program  
The REACH Healthcare Foundation  
The Rural Resources Group  
The Support Center  
The Watershed Research and Training Center  
TN Association of Utility Districts  
Virginia Association for Biological Farming  
Wild Rose Pictures LC  
Women, Food and Agriculture Network