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,