



August 2, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Stabenow and Ranking Member Peterson:

The Campaign for Renewed Rural Development (CRRD) is a coalition of national policy advocacy organizations representing a broad spectrum of interests focused on rural issues. The CRRD unites around the need for a robust Rural Development Title within the farm bill that provides critical investments to some of our nation's most underserved communities and enhances rural America's competitiveness in a global marketplace.

From clean water and broadband infrastructure to nutrition assistance and energy conservation – the farm bill helps each of the undersigned member organizations to provide a strong foundation for a better tomorrow. However, as Congress begins conferencing our nation's next farm bill reauthorization, we ask for your continued support for rural communities through a robust Rural Development Title that promotes economic growth and stability by investing in our nation's rural infrastructure, incentivizing regional collaboration and ensuring the success of our next generation of farmers.

Rural Development programs are critical for rural communities to provide basic services including protecting public health, building affordable housing, workforce training, updating and expanding critical infrastructure and broadband service, creating jobs and promoting economic growth.

The section below highlights specific provisions from both bills within the Rural Development Title that underscore key rural priorities. We encourage their inclusion as you work to resolve the differences between the two packages.

Senate Farm Bill - Rural Development Title

- The Senate bill would reinstate the Undersecretary of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to oversee the \$216 billion USDA Rural Development portfolio.
- The Senate bill would create the Interagency Council on Rural Community Innovation and Economic Development to help leverage federal resources aimed at rural communities.
- The Senate bill create the Rural Investment Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant Program, helping localities strengthen the local economy through job accelerator partnerships with the private sector and institutions of higher education.

- Senate bill would create a Rural Health Liaison to help promote programs across all agencies aimed at addressing rural health issues.
- The Senate bill amends USDA's successful Water Well System Grant Program to include much-needed water treatment technology and on-site septic repairs in rural areas will protect the health of rural residents and the environments in which they live.
- The Senate bill reserves Distance Learning and Telemedicine funds and prioritizes Community Facilities Loans and Grants for projects that address opioid misuse in rural communities.

House Farm Bill – Rural Development Title

- The House bill would give the USDA Secretary the authority to prioritize projects that help counties address rural health crises.
- The House bill would expand broadband loan program eligibility to include “middle mile” broadband infrastructure projects. Additionally, any localities that are the recipient of a USDA Rural Development grant, loan, or loan guarantee would have the flexibility to use up to 10 percent of the funds towards broadband facilities, services, and rural infrastructure.

House and Senate Farm Bill – Rural Development Title

- Both bills would expand the language of the Strategic Economic and Community Development Program to cover all programs under USDA Rural Development, and require the Secretary provide technical assistance to communities in developing strategic community investment plans.
- Both bills strengthen critical rural infrastructure and technical assistance funding for USDA's Water and Environmental Programs with priority given to rural communities facing serious staff capacity and water contamination issues.

As rural communities struggle with the impacts of volatile commodity markets, trade tensions, health disparities, the opioid epidemic, and recovering from the Great Recession, increased investments in programs that support rural community and economic development is needed now more than ever; it is paramount that the final farm bill includes robust mandatory funding for value-added enterprise, rural-micro enterprise and rural energy development.

We appreciate your continued leadership and support and stand ready to leverage the shared goals of the undersigned organizations to pass a flexible and fully funded Rural Development Title in the next farm bill.

Sincerely,

Center for Rural Affairs
 Fahe
 Fair Food Network
 Housing Assistance Council
 National Association of Counties
 National Association of Development Organizations
 National Association of Regional Councils
 National Association of Towns and Townships
 National Farmers Union
 National League of Cities
 National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
 Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
 Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc.
 Rural Community College Alliance
 State Agriculture and Rural Leaders

Cc: House and Senate Farm Bill Conference Committee Members