



September 22, 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman, Committee on  
Agriculture , Nutrition & Forestry  
United States Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Agriculture , Nutrition & Forestry  
United States Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Roberts:

The Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development is a collaboration of 32 national organizations with a strong interest in the future of small town and rural America. Our organizations are working individually and collectively to support rural development programs and strategies that promote rural prosperity. The upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization is a key opportunity for Congress and the Administration to bolster the effectiveness of the federal investments made in rural America through USDA Rural Development.

Our organizations are mobilizing to raise awareness in the Farm Bill debate about the critical need for rural development resources and program flexibility to help our nation's rural communities and regions compete in today's global marketplace and improve the quality of life for local citizens. Individually, we have multiple solutions and suggestions for improving the Farm Bill's Rural Development Title.

Collectively, we recommend the adoption of the following six principles that will strengthen USDA Rural Development's investments.

- **Clarify Mission of USDA Rural Development** - In addition to its traditional and vital role as a lender of last resort helping rural individuals and communities, the agency going forward should be viewed as a crucial partner in forging new economic opportunities that help rural people and places thrive.
- **Provide Flexibility and Incentives for Regional Collaboration** - Rural Development must be reoriented, through statutory language, to give its programs greater flexibility to encourage the local and regional partnerships that are currently encouraging innovation in rural regions across the country.
- **Maintain Rural Development Investments** - We recognize the extreme fiscal challenges under which the Farm Bill will be written and the pressure to cut mandatory funding. We urge Congress and the Administration to work to ensure that rural investments, such as USDA Rural Development, do not receive disproportionate cuts. Rather we urge you to maintain mandatory funding for Rural Development in the 2012 Farm Bill.

- **Maintain and Improve Technical Assistance** - We support the reauthorization of technical assistance programs due to their success in leveraging outside resources, minimizing the risk of default on Rural Development loans, and developing the capacity of local leaders to manage large projects. In addition, we urge you to authorize a technical assistance set-aside for the Essential Community Facilities program. We also urge you to bolster Rural Development staff and TA providers' capacity to assist rural communities and regions with comprehensive economic development planning.
- **Improve Metrics and Accountability** - We urge Congress to require USDA to increase its use of outcome-based evaluation metrics and to evaluate the community and system wide impacts of its programs on the economy of rural communities and regions.
- **Streamline Application and Reporting Processes** - We urge Congress to provide authorizing language that demands a culture of continuous evaluation of current best practices that streamline application and reporting processes. These processes should be adjusted to meet the staffing and capacity challenges of all rural communities and businesses, especially the most rural communities and businesses.

The members of the Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development look forward to working with you during the Farm Bill process to bolster the effectiveness of the investments made in rural America through USDA Rural Development. Through a comprehensive Rural Development Title, rural people and places will gain increased access to important seed capital, infrastructure financing, professional expertise and support services that help translate rural dreams and hopes into reality.

We thank you for your commitment to rural America and urge you to adopt the six key priorities outlined in this document, which are detailed further in a joint principles statement created by the Campaign.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES, CHAIR  
 AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
 AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
 AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION  
 CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS  
 COUNCIL OF STATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES  
 HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL  
 LEAGUE OF RURAL VOTERS  
 MAIN STREET PROJECT  
 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS  
 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS  
 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS  
 NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE CONFERENCE  
 NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES  
 NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL  
 NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
 NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION  
 NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION  
 NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 PARTNERS FOR RURAL AMERICA  
 RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP  
 RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALLIANCE