

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

As you begin consideration of the Fiscal Year 2020 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, we strongly encourage the subcommittee to continue its bipartisan commitment to rural America at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and support \$8 million for the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program.

Across the nation, one in three Americans is a member of at least one cooperative business, from electric cooperatives, farmer-owned and worker-owned co-ops, to Farm Credit Institutions and credit unions, and many more. Cooperatives range from small businesses that are the pillars in their communities to billion-dollar companies that employ thousands of workers. Moreover, cooperative businesses generate \$75 billion in wages annually.¹

Each year, USDA awards approximately 30 entities with RCDG funding that facilitates cooperative development by providing technical assistance, education and training to help peoples start-up, convert or expand existing businesses.² These funds are instrumental in providing the necessary support to new or evolving companies that drive our local economies. In the last decade, RCDG funding has supported the creation, growth, or conversion of approximately 500 companies, and created or saved 6,300 jobs, primarily in rural America.³

Cooperative businesses are the heart of local economies. Cooperative members are more likely to spend their money close to home and reinvest in their local economy. We should continue to support programs that facilitate the empowerment of producers, workers, and consumers helping them earn more of the profits they help create, and ensure that small businesses are not only surviving, but thriving in communities across the nation.

¹ National Cooperative Business Association

² <https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/news-release/usda-announces-58-million-support-rural-cooperatives>

³ [CooperationWorks!](#) the Cooperative Development Network

Thank you for your consideration of our request of \$8 million for the Rural Cooperative Rural Grant program, and for your continued support of business development in rural America.

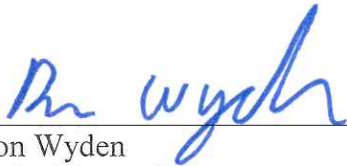
Sincerely,



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



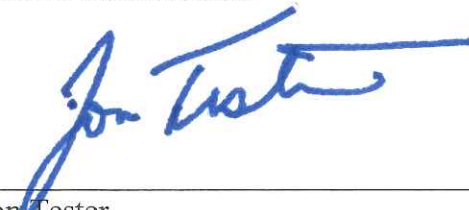
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator