

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

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

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

Dear Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Hoeven,

As you begin consideration of the Fiscal Year 2022 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 full funding for the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program at \$40 million, with no less than \$15 million made available for competitive RCDG grants for cooperative development centers.

Cooperative businesses have a legacy track record of being a self-help tool to empower people to fully capture the economic and social needs of its members and the local community. Co-ops are formed to address market failures, help small businesses gain parity, and give consumers greater choice. The power of cooperatives is particularly clear in rural America where marketing and farm supply cooperatives help level the playing field for small farmers, and homes and businesses are powered by community-owned electric cooperatives.

The Rural Cooperative Development Grant program is awarded on a competitive basis to non-profit cooperative development centers to provide technical assistance, education, and training to support the start-up, conversion, or expansion of rural cooperative businesses. In the last ten years, RCDG funds have supported the creation, growth or conversion of more than 500 cooperative businesses and created or saved more than 10,000 jobs.¹ In recent years, RCDG funds have supported rural cooperatives in sectors including but not limited to agriculture, housing, childcare, food access and distribution, and restaurants.

Importantly, cooperatives—owned and controlled by its members—have historically increased in number after economic shock, when community members seek a stable, resilient model that can meet evolving needs and serve mutual interest.² It is necessary to increase funding available through the Rural Cooperative Development Grant program to make certain that community

¹ CooperationWorks

² National Cooperative Business Association

organizations can meet the growing demand for cooperative businesses in innovative new ways to help people, businesses and communities recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and build a more sustainable and equitable economy.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for full funding of the Rural Cooperative Development Grant program, ensuring no less than \$15 million for cooperative development grants, and for your continued support of community and economic development in rural America.

Sincerely,



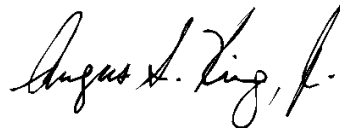
Tina Smith
United States Senator



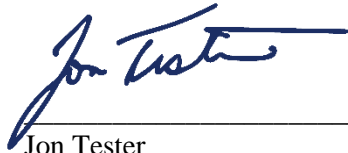
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Angus King
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



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United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
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