

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29th

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Vice Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs Bishop and DeLauro, Ranking Members Fortenberry and Granger:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2022 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies appropriations, we urge you to continue the longstanding, bipartisan support for our rural constituents and communities and to fully fund the USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program at its authorized level of \$40 million, with no less than \$15 million made available for competitive RCDG grants.

Cooperatives have been a critical tool in the United States for more than a century that have helped farmers gain greater access to markets, brought electricity to 90 percent of rural households in less than a generation, and created access to financial services through credit unions to provide banking services to more Americans. Today, cooperatives exist in nearly every sector of our economy, generating \$75 billion in annual wages and \$650 billion in revenues.

The Rural Cooperative Development Grant program enables non-profit cooperative development centers across the country to provide technical assistance, feasibility studies, training, and business planning to help convert, expand or start-up cooperatives. This support is a lifeline to communities to support small businesses innovate and evolve to address changing markets and economic conditions.

RCDG has been allocated flat funding for the last decade, and the impacts of the COVID-19 have only made the need to increase funding for this program more critical. Like other times in our nation's history, people turn to cooperatives in the wake of an economic downturn. We must ensure that the necessary recourses to support this form of entrepreneurship are available to meet demand and help people capture economic opportunity in rural communities. Cooperatives are more likely to hire employees from the local workforce, source products from local producers

and reinvest at higher rates into the local economy.¹ Because of their one-member, one-share, one-vote structure, cooperatives are also a more resilient business model and is inherently interested in the long-term wellbeing of its stakeholders to create and maintain economic opportunity.

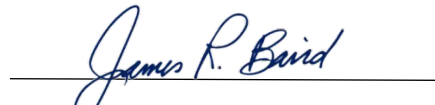
Across the country, more than half of all small businesses are owned by people ages 55 and older approaching retirement. It is imperative that we preserve these small businesses, and in many cases a market rate purchase by employees or community investors to form a cooperative is in the best interest of all stakeholders—the retiring owner, the workers, and the community. This is especially critical in rural America to maintain and create job opportunity, affordable housing options, and preserve access to critical goods and services, all contributing to a high quality of life in our rural communities.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to fully fund the Rural Cooperative Development Grant program, ensuring \$15 million available for RCDG grants, and for your ongoing support of rural communities.

Sincerely,



Angie Craig
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



James R. Baird
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Joined by:

/s/
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

/s/
Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress

/s/
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/
Ron Kind
Member of Congress

/s/
Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress

/s/
Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

/s/
Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/
Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress

/s/
Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

/s/
Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

¹ Theodos, Brett, Corianne Payton Scally, and Leiha Edmonds. “ABCs of Cooperative Impact.” Urban Institute, December 2018. <https://nbaclusa.coop/resources/abcs-of-cooperative-impact/>.