

## **The Strengthening Rural Cooperatives and Communities Act**

Cooperatives play a critical role in rural economies and can be found throughout almost every sector in the United States. As a business model, cooperatives are more resilient to economic headwinds while significantly contributing to local communities. However, due to the persistent challenges facing rural communities such as barriers to federal funding streams, the gap in economic and community development outcomes between these communities and their urban and suburban areas continue to grow. Despite these challenges, through the Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program nonprofits and institutions of higher education provide support to rural businesses saving and improving the quality of thousands of jobs, businesses and creating new economic opportunities for residents.

The *Strengthening Rural Cooperatives and Communities Act* would build on the successes of the RCDG program by reauthorizing the program and making key improvements to maximize on federal dollars while building capacity for Rural Technical Assistance Providers. This bill would:

- Reduce regulatory burden and increase effectiveness of program delivery by allowing the Secretary to implement multi-year grants for applicants with a demonstrated track record of success;
- Allow under-resourced and often more rural applicants to compete within the program by removing barriers such as “scoring on a curve” within program match requirements; and
- Have the Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development (authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill) submit an annual report on their progress and analyze data on cooperatives from the Economic Census;

**Endorsements:** California Center for Cooperative Development, Carolina Common Enterprise, CoBank, Colorado Farm Bureau, Cooperative Development Foundation, Cooperative Development Services, Cooperative Network, CooperationWorks, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Indiana Cooperative Development Center, Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, Keystone Development Center, Montana Council of Cooperatives, National Cooperative Bank, National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA, North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, Northwest Cooperative Development Center, Pine Bluff Cotton Belt Federal Credit Union, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, Worldwide Civil Society Consultancy