



RCAP Statement of Support: 2018 Farm Bill Conference Package

On behalf of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) and our national network of service providers, we would like to offer our strong statement of support for the 2018 Farm Bill Conference package and urge swift passage of the measure this week.

In particular, we appreciate the conferees bipartisan work on the 2018 Farm Bill and Rural Development Title and applaud the many changes you have made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of USDA programs.

Specifically, we strongly support efforts in the final bill to:

- Strengthen critical rural infrastructure, solid waste, and technical assistance funding for USDA's Water and Environmental Programs with priority given to rural communities facing serious water contamination issues. Also, by providing rural communities greater access and program training for USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service Programs.
- Allow for greater small water system lending to cover important pre-development costs for upgrading critical rural infrastructure and providing greater flexibility under the guaranteed lending programs.
- Establish a federal interagency taskforce to examine drinking water and surface water contamination in rural communities.
- Reaffirm the importance of the U.S. Senate confirmed position of Undersecretary of Agriculture for Rural Development within the recent USDA reorganization.
- Assist rural communities with accessing important seed capital, loans, and leveraging other rural business programs by establishing a Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant Program, which will foster locally-driven "rural jobs accelerator partnerships" made up of various rural stakeholders to improve their local economy and position their region to be more competitive.

Additionally, the positive changes made to USDA's successful Water Well System Grant Program to include much-needed onsite septic repairs in rural areas will protect the health of rural residents and the environments in which they live. Many rural homes have no means of properly disposing of wastewater, such as a connection to a municipal wastewater treatment facility or an onsite treatment system like a septic tank, or are suffering from failing or unaffordable onsite treatment systems. This provision will help

rural, low- to moderate-income Americans get the assistance they need to upgrade or install proper wastewater treatment services.

Finally, we support the final bill's efforts to strengthen the Rural Utilities Service Technical Assistance and Training Program, which authorizes technical assistance and training for communities across the country, will greatly enhance the ability of small towns to invest in critical water upgrades, public health, and safety facilities that are necessary to build a prosperous rural economy. Technical assistance programs help protect taxpayer dollars by leveraging outside capital and ensuring a positive return on RD direct loans and loan guarantees. In addition, the bill's continued support for vital rural infrastructure, like water and wastewater, increased access to reliable broadband service, and essential community facilities will help build a foundation for economic development and renewal in rural America.

RCAP stands ready and willing to assist the conferees in pushing for final adoption of the 2018 Farm Bill Conference Package this week.

We thank the conferees commitment to rural America and their earnest efforts to ensure a robust rural economy through the Rural Development Title.

Sincerely,



Nathan Ohle
Executive Director
Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc. (RCAP)