

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2021

Hon. Sanford Bishop, Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Hon. Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

Rural America needs improved housing. Years of declining investment in our small towns and farming communities has resulted in a housing deficit. As a result, in some rural communities, economic growth is hindered not by the lack of jobs but by the lack of housing for workers.¹ According to U.S. Census data, between 1999 and 2008, the average annual production of new single-family houses in non-metro areas totaled 221,000. In the period 2009 to 2017, average production fell to 68,000 per year.²

In areas where there is housing, it is likely to be in poor condition. Of the 25 million units located in rural and small communities, over 5 percent, or 1.5 million, of these homes are considered either moderately or severely substandard. For example, more than 30 percent of the nation's housing units lacking hot and cold piped water are in rural and small-town communities. On some Native American lands, the incidence of homes lacking basic plumbing is more than 10 times the national level.³ Rental housing, where it is available, often costs too much. According to a recent report by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, 41 percent (5 million households) of rural renters are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing costs, and nearly half of rural households (2.1 million) pay more than 50 percent of their income for housing.⁴ According to the most recent National Agricultural Workers Survey, 33 percent of all farmworkers and 45 percent of migrant farmworkers live in crowded dwellings⁵. Consequently, three out of every five farmworker families live below the federal poverty line.

A generation of budget cuts for rural housing programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is one of the driving factors of housing distress in rural areas. Adjusted for inflation,

¹ Raice, Shayndi. "Rural America Has Jobs. Now It Just Needs Housing." *Wall Street Journal* May 30, 2018.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/scarcity-of-housing-in-rural-america-drives-worker-shortage-1527672602>

² United States Census Bureau. (2018). *Metropolitan Statistical Area Status for New Single-Family Houses Completed*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/construction/charts/pdf/metro.pdf>

³ Housing Assistance Council, "Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty, and Housing in the 21st Century." December 2012.

http://www.ruralhome.org/storage/documents/ts2010/ts_full_report.pdf

⁴ Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, "America's Rental Housing." 2017.

http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/harvard_jchs_americas_rental_housing_2017_0.pdf

⁵ "National Agricultural Workers Survey." January 2018.

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf

since Fiscal Year 2000, loan subsidies and related assistance for home ownership and repair and financing of rental housing and farm labor have been cut by over 60 percent. As a result, USDA finances only less 7000 mortgages a year for low and very low-income homeowners, there is no funding for direct loans for rental housing new construction, meager support for preservation of existing rental housing and only about 200 units of housing financed annually for migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

With a growing deficit in the supply of decent affordable housing, nearly one quarter of the country's impoverished living in rural areas, and millions unable to gain access to clear drinking water, we believe it is time to reinvest in rural America.

We urge the Committee to:

- Double Direct Homeownership Loans for Low-Income Families to \$2 billion.
- Increase Mutual and Self Help Housing to \$75 million.
- Provide \$1 billion to finance the construction of new rental housing and the preservation of existing rural rental housing.
- Extend rental assistance to all households living in USDA rental housing by increasing appropriations by \$350 million.
- Set appropriations for farm labor housing loans and grants at \$80 million.
- Increase Financing for Rural Water and Wastewater Facilities to \$3 billion in loans and \$1.6 billion in grants.
- Improve resources available for low income home repair grants to \$100 million.
- Increase the capacity of non-profit organizations to provide support rural housing and development activity by providing \$12 million for the Rural Community Development Initiative.

We appreciate your past support of these important programs and your attention to this matter.



Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/

Jennifer González-Colón
Member of Congress

/s/

Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

/s/

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

/s/

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

/s/
Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

/s/
Ron Kind
Member of Congress

/s/
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Takano
Member of Congress

/s/
Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress

/s/
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

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

/s/
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

/s/
Jared Golden
Member of Congress

/s/
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/
Don Young
Member of Congress

/s/
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

/s/
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

/s/
Angie Craig
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter Welch
Member of Congress

/s/
Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress

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Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress

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Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

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Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

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John Katko
Member of Congress

/s/
Darren Soto
Member of Congress

/s/
Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

/s/
Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/
Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress

/s/
A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

/s/
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member