WASHINGTON, D.C. – In testimony on behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), Mathias McCauley, director of regional planning and community development for the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, today urged the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to make rural development programs and funding a priority in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Congress is in the process of considering reauthorization of the Farm Bill, which expires later this year. NACo supports full funding of all titles in the 2012 reauthorization of the Farm Bill which includes critical support for agriculture, rural development, nutrition, research and conservation. Reauthorizing the Farm Bill and placing a particular emphasis within this reauthorization on enhanced and flexible rural development resources is a key legislative priority for NACo.

McCauley said especially important are flexible rural development programs that focus limited federal resources on county and regional priorities, which are asset-based development strategies that create conditions for quality job growth. His testimony was on behalf of NACo and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

“Rural development is a vital tool for regional development organizations and our local government and community partners as we strive to position our communities for the future,” McCauley told the committee, chaired by Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.). “That is why NACo and NADO are joined by a broad base of 32 other national organizations in advocating for USDA Rural Development through the Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development.”

During his testimony, McCauley cited three key areas related to USDA Rural Development and the future of rural counties and regions:

- The mission area of USDA Rural Development is a critical piece to the overall competitiveness of rural regions as communities work to foster job growth, regional innovation, and economic prosperity;

- With rural regions facing increasingly global competition and opportunities, it is necessary to ensure USDA Rural Development has the tools, resources and flexibility to assist rural communities and regions with cutting-edge, asset-based regional innovation strategies and investments; and

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USDA Rural Development applications, policies, and reporting requirements should be streamlined and simplified so that they are more accessible to rural people, businesses and communities and assist in meeting the emerging needs and opportunities of rural regions and communities.

Click here to read the full testimony. More information is available in the Agricultural and Rural Affairs section of the NACo website or by contacting Erik Johnston at 202.942.4230.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.