

SUPPORT COUNTY PRIORITIES AS CONGRESS BEGINS WORK ON NEXT FARM BILL

ACTION NEEDED:

This year, Congress begins negotiations for the reauthorization of a new Farm Bill. Current legislation, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), expires at the end of FY 2023. NACo will continue to work with federal partners to ensure a new, long-term Farm Bill reauthorization that includes key county priorities is signed into law in 2023.

Urge your members of Congress to support county priorities throughout the development of the 2023 Farm Bill. Farm Bill programs help counties make critical investments in infrastructure, economic development, nutrition and conservation. Preserving and expanding these programs is vital to the continued prosperity of rural counties and the communities they serve.

BACKGROUND:

Last authorized for five years in 2018 as *the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (P.L. 115-334), the 2018 Farm Bill was a major piece of bipartisan legislation that authorized \$428.3 billion in funding for a broad range of USDA programs important to counties.

The Farm Bill contains 12 titles in key areas including Commodity Programs for our nation's producers, Conservation and Forestry provisions, Nutrition, Credit, and Rural Development. Counties support full funding for each title of the Farm Bill. The programs authorized through the bill help strengthen rural infrastructure - including broadband and water and wastewater systems, support rural development initiatives coordinated with local officials to protect our nation's food supply, increase access to healthy food for low-income populations through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), and promote environmental stewardship and conservation.

NACo successfully advocated for the inclusion of several key county priorities within the 2018 Farm Bill, including:

- **Securing the permanent reinstatement of the Undersecretary of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)** who oversees the over \$200 billion USDA Rural Development portfolio.
- **Establishing the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy Grant Program**, which helps counties strengthen the local economy through partnerships with the private sector and institutions of higher education

THE FARM BILL CONTAINS PROGRAMS THAT HELP COUNTIES MAKE CRITICAL INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, NUTRITION AND CONSERVATION. PRESERVING THESE PROGRAMS IS VITAL TO THE STRENGTH OF OUR LOCAL AND NATIONAL ECONOMY.

COUNTIES SUPPORT FULL FUNDING OF ALL TITLES OF THIS IMPORTANT LEGISLATION.

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- **Including \$350 million for the deployment of rural broadband** through initiatives such as the ReConnect Program, the Community Connect Program, and the Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan and Loan Guarantee Program

With the current legislation set to expire on September 30, 2023, the U.S. Congress is working to draft a new, five-year Farm Bill with congressional hearings already underway to determine public and private stakeholders' priorities for the reauthorization.

Farm Bill programs of interest to counties include:

- **\$150 million for the Water and Waste Water Program:** Rural Water and Wastewater Programs help counties fund and finance critical water infrastructure and provide access to affordable and clean water to rural communities.
- **\$82 million for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program:** This program helps rural communities access and utilize the internet, overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density. Eligible applicants include most entities that provide education or health care through telecommunications, including counties and federally-recognized tribes.
- **\$50 million for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program:** The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers.
- **SNAP Reauthorization:** The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and maintained existing eligibility and work requirements for the SNAP program. The legislation also expanded job training and other SNAP Employment and Training programs originally authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.
- **\$350 million for rural broadband** infrastructure and increased the flexibility for USDA broadband loans and grants.

KEY TALKING POINTS:

- All titles of the Farm Bill are important to the vitality of our nation. Counties support full funding of all titles of this important legislation.
- The Rural Development title supports rural business and community development and addresses a wide range of policy issues concerning rural America, including equity capital development in rural areas, regional economic planning and development, essential community facilities, water and wastewater infrastructure needs, value-added agricultural development and broadband telecommunications development
- Urge your members of Congress to support county priorities throughout the development of the 2023 Farm Bill. Programs throughout the Farm Bill help counties make critical investments in infrastructure, economic development, nutrition and conservation. Preserving these programs is vital to the strength of our local and national economies.

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