August 8, 2018

The Hon. Pat Roberts  The Hon. Michael Conaway
Chairman  Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture  U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Debbie Stabenow  The Hon. Collin Peterson
Ranking Member  Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture  U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Stabenow and Ranking Member Peterson:

Thank you for your leadership on the farm bill and on-going work leading the bicameral conference committee. As you well know, the farm bill is a critical piece of legislation that directly affects communities small and large across the nation. APA appreciates your efforts to enact new legislation before the current statute expires.

This legislation consists of one of the most direct areas of federal involvement in the planning and development of the nation’s communities. APA represents more than 40,000 planners, planning officials and engaged citizens working to ensure prosperity, opportunity and mobility for all. The members and leaders of APA have identified the farm bill as a key priority for building better, stronger communities. This work is supported by a robust rural development program that supports rural economic development and innovations in food systems planning and strong conservation programs that protect our environment.

APA has identified several policy provisions from both bills that support and improve planning for a stronger economy, healthier communities, and enhanced environment. We encourage their inclusion as you work to resolve the differences between the two packages. In particular, we ask that you adopt Senate-passed provisions including mandatory funding for a Local Agriculture Market Program that builds on success and innovations in local food access and planning.

APA urges you to include the following:

**Senate Farm Bill**

- The Local Agriculture Market Program with mandatory funding of $60 million per year to enhance healthy food access, regional food markets, and food systems planning;
• The establishment of an Urban, Indoor and Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education and Extension Initiative with a competitive grant program supported through mandatory funding;
• The creation of a new Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production at USDA;
• The creation of a produce prescription pilot program;
• The reinstatement of the Under Secretary of Rural Development for USDA to oversee the $216 billion rural development portfolio;
• The creation of the Interagency Council on Rural Community Innovation and Economic Development to help leverage federal resources aimed at rural communities;
• The reauthorization of the Healthy Food Finance Initiative and expansion to include a broader range of food enterprises;
• The continuation of a separate Conservation Stewardship Program with improved policy coordination provisions; and
• The improvement of the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program.

House Farm Bill
• The continuation of current funding levels for Community Food Projects;
• The increased funding for the Food Insecurity Incentives Program;
• The expanded eligibility and flexibility for rural broadband, including the provision to allow communities to use up to 10 percent of rural development loan, loan guarantee or grant programs for broadband infrastructure; and
• The requirement for USDA to measure, evaluate and report on conservation program outcomes.

Both Bills
• The expansion of the language of the Strategic Economic and Community Development Program to cover all programs under USDA Rural Development, and require the Secretary provide technical assistance to communities in developing strategic community investment plans; and
• The strengthening of critical rural infrastructure and technical assistance funding for USDA’s Water and Environmental Programs with priority given to rural communities facing serious staff capacity and water contamination issues.

Communities face critical challenges that can be addressed through this legislation. We have the opportunity to improve the way we grow rural economies, connect people to healthy food, and improve regional connections to our food system.

APA appreciates your continued leadership and support for improving federal policy through a new farm bill that improves and strengthens the nation’s communities.
Sincerely,

Cynthia Bowen, FAICP  
President, American Planning Association