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September 7, 2012

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Dear Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

As of October 1, 2012 more than 100 communities (933 nationally), located in 21 California Congressional Districts, will lose eligibility status for housing programs under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development Agency unless Congressional action is taken. The pending ineligibility of these communities is a result of a reclassification of rural status, based on 2010 census information. Currently, eligibility for housing programs is determined based on rural status prior to 1990 census data and until receipt of 2010 census information. A previous amendment, (2000 - Pub. L. 106-554), replaced the original reclassification year from 2000 to 2010. This amendment allowed communities, which are very much rural in characteristic, continued access to rural housing programs under the USDA.

Rural housing programs are critical for California and even more so for the agricultural industry within our state. As the nation's largest agricultural producer, California employs a significant number of agricultural workers whom are often located in rural areas. Communities, agricultural employers, and non-profits located in these areas use the USDA Rural Development Agency's housing programs to meet the needs and improve the quality of life for individuals, families and farm workers.

Based on testimony that we received at a recent meeting of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture from agricultural stakeholders, non-profits, and labor organizations focusing on farm labor issues, we strongly encourage you to take action on amending the rural definition status within section 520 of the Housing Act of 1949 (42 U.S.C. 1490). An amendment would substitute "1990, 2000, or 2010 decennial census" for "1990 or 2000 decennial census" in determining any area classified as "rural" or "rural area." This minor amendment would continue program eligibility for 933 communities nationwide, 102 of which are located within California, for rural housing programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and for your support of California's food system.

Sincerely,

Craig McNamara
President

cc: Secretary Karen Ross

