



Percent for Place

June 8, 2023

Hon. Debbie Stabenow, Chair
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
419 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. John Boozman, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The Percent for Place coalition is composed of like-minded organizations working to increase federal funding for civic infrastructure. “Civic infrastructure” is a network of public places that boost local economies, increase resiliency and trust, support health and well-being, create a more equitable society and strengthen democracy for all. Our coalition members include organizations that foster parks, trails, Main Streets, town squares, play spaces, libraries, recreation centers, schoolyards, and other public spaces; all of which we consider vital civic infrastructure in communities of every type.

As the Senate moves to reauthorize the Farm Bill, our members respectfully request an amendment to existing the Community Facilities program language. By explicitly including the term “civic infrastructure” in §306 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1926(a)), critical projects in rural communities, like the construction of parks, libraries, and Main Street public spaces, would be eligible to secure loans under §306(a)(1) and grants under §306(a)(19)(A) of the law. These necessary forms of financing would help foster rural economic development through short-term construction jobs and enhanced long-term marketplaces where people could find good paying jobs. These newly eligible projects would also create the spaces that communities need for education, health, and civil dialogue.

In addition to that amendment, we also ask the committee to increase the level of funding available under the Community Facilities grants program and ensure that civic infrastructure is an eligible category. And finally, we ask that clarifying language be inserted into the Community Facilities grant program’s statute allowing for its use to support some types of recreational activities. Currently, USDA regulation 7 CFR 1942.17 (d)(2)(ii) prohibits the use of these funds towards any recreational facility. Our coalition acknowledges that in the past some “recreational projects” did not follow the spirit of the law and funded projects that were not in the general public interest. However, we believe that if the definition of “recreational” was limited to those activities that are widely accessible to the public at either no or de minimus cost and serve a public good, then communities would benefit while taxpayers’ dollars would be protected from wasteful or frivolous purposes.

Percent for Place is supported by a broad coalition of organizations working to create welcoming and robust civic infrastructure for all Americans.

By making these adjustments the Farm Bill could have a more meaningful impact on the farming communities that we rely on for our food. The agriculture sector is made up of more than just the land our food is grown on and the equipment and supplies that farmers need, it is also the people who work on and own that land, as well as their families. Rural civic infrastructure supports their human needs by giving them places to learn, recreate, congregate, and share while improving the quality of life in rural towns across America.

The small business owner, the coach, and the librarian in rural America rely on supportive Rural Development programs contained in the Farm Bill just as much as our nation's farmers do. That is why these small, yet significant changes can be transformative for an entire community. Without robust services, it will be harder to build the sense of community that is necessary to attract and retain people in rural farming towns that form the backbone of America's heartland.

The Percent for Place coalition thanks you for considering our proposals for the Farm Bill. We would be happy to meet with your offices to discuss these ideas further and answer any questions you might have.

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June 8, 2023

Hon. G.T. Thompson, Chair
House Agriculture Committee
400 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3815

Hon. David Scott, Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee
468 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1013

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

The Percent for Place coalition is composed of like-minded organizations working to increase federal funding for civic infrastructure. “Civic infrastructure” is a network of public places that boost local economies, increase resiliency and trust, support health and well-being, create a more equitable society and strengthen democracy for all. Our coalition members include organizations that foster parks, trails, Main Streets, town squares, play spaces, libraries, recreation centers, schoolyards, and other public spaces; all of which we consider vital civic infrastructure in communities of every type.

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