



March 26, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, DC 20250-1590

RE: Inclusion of California in Rural Partners Network (RPN) - SUPPORT

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

In April of 2022, the Biden-Harris Administration launched the Rural Partners Network (RPN) – a new whole-of-government effort led by your agency, to transform the way federal agencies partner with rural places to create economic opportunities. Since launching, RPN has designated two cohorts encompassing ten states and Tribal Nations. We are writing to strongly urge you to consider California’s rural communities in any next selection cohort, and to introduce you to our organization, Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) (www.rcrcnet.org), who could serve as the local/regional anchor host.

About Rural California

Rural California contains a multitude of local geographies and varied economic development drivers. For example, the City of Monterey, located in Monterey County, is home to a world-renowned aquarium and research institute, alongside tourist destinations for recreation and wine-tasting. Twenty-six (26) miles to the north sits the small unincorporated agricultural community of Pajaro, which was severely impacted by storms in March 2023, but is still recovering and has required many state and federal resources to bounce back. Both communities provide important resources to the California economy, and both are located in the same county, but the resources available to the communities vary widely. Another example of geographic diversity is Mono County, on the eastern side of the state. Mono County is home to Mammoth Lakes, a popular outdoor recreation area. However, travel within Mono County may be impossible during certain times of the year due to massive snowfall and a lack of transportation options. Many small communities rely on larger hubs, such as Mammoth Lakes or Reno (Nevada), for goods and services, emergency services, education, and more; yet accessibility challenges or great distances often separate communities. Examples such as these

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ALPINE · AMADOR · BUTTE · CALAVERAS · COLUSA · DEL NORTE · EL DORADO · GLENN · HUMBOLDT · IMPERIAL · INYO · KINGS · LAKE · LASSEN
MADERA · MARIPOSA · MENDOCINO · MERCED · MODOC · MONO · MONTEREY · NAPA · NEVADA · PLACER · PLUMAS · SAN BENITO · SAN LUIS OBISPO
SANTA BARBARA · SHASTA · SIERRA · SISKIYOU · SOLANO · SONOMA · SUTTER · TEHAMA · TRINITY · TULARE · TUOLUMNE · YOLO · YUBA

can be found in nearly every rural county throughout California, illustrating the systemic need for resources in both our smaller and larger rural communities.

It is our understanding that one part of the selection process for RPN communities is conducted via data collection to determine areas in greatest need of the program. We believe that our state's large and diverse counties and complex geographical nature may inadvertently under-represent many of the most disadvantaged communities of California and the nation. Very large counties may contain both population-dense towns and cities, as well as large highly rural areas. Examples of this include higher income coastal tourist destinations located in the same county as disadvantaged farm worker communities, or Sierra travel destinations within the same county border as large under-resourced rural mountain communities, which are often without adequate health care or access to education, are low income, and face the high risk of the ravages of wildfires and other natural threats.

About RCRC

RCRC represents 40 of California's 58 counties, those that are most rural, and advocates for and implements economic development strategies in our most disadvantaged and under-resourced communities. The RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each of our 40 member counties. RCRC's strong connections to the counties and their constituents allow the organization to be an effective convener, policy advisor, and innovative service provider. This aligns well with the mission of Rural Partners Network (RPN), to expand rural prosperity through job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement. We believe such a partnership could leverage and extend staffing as well as provide greatly needed assistance to a much larger area more efficiently. Furthermore, RCRC maintains strong relationships across state and federal agencies to provide counties with technical assistance and capacity building, which are essential to ensuring rural competitiveness in grant and loan programs.

An example of a highly effective program that RCRC created is the Rural Grant Accelerator Program (RGAP). Currently funded and staffed by RCRC in its "pilot" phase, RGAP provides technical assistance to identify critical projects; match available and future grant/loan programs to these projects; fund grant writing expertise; and assist in implementing reimbursable awarded grants by providing no or low interest short term bridge loans to initiate project work.

California Delegation Support

For your reference, attached again is a letter of support from the California House delegation. Note, we expect you will receive similar letters of support shortly from our two California Senators as well as our Governor. We have also attached your response letter to the California House delegation. We are aware of the budget limitations for this program and have been advocating in support of RPN with Congressional leaders for increased resources for this vital program. Our hope and ask is that when those resources become available and

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new cohort decisions possible, California is strongly considered for the reasons we have presented in this correspondence.

Finally, we met recently with Mr. Lee Jones, Executive Director of RPN, who was extremely knowledgeable and helpful. We had an excellent discussion and feel confident he truly understands the vast rural areas of California and the significant needs that an RPN selection, alongside RCRC in partnership, could address.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Chris Lopez
RCRC Chair
Monterey County Supervisor

cc: Katie Wheeler Mathews, Office of the California Governor
The Honorable Karen Ross, Secretary, CA Department of Food and Agriculture
The Honorable Alex Padilla, Member of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Laphonza Butler, Member of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Pete Aguilar, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Nanette Diaz Barragán, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ami Bera, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Julia Brownley, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ken Calvert, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Salud Carbajal, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Tony Cárdenas, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Judy Chu, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable J. Luis Correa, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jim Costa, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable John Duarte, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Anna Eshoo, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable John Garamendi, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Robert Garcia, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mike Garcia, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jimmy Gomez, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Josh Harder, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Darrell Issa, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Sara Jacobs, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Sydney Kamlager-Dove, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ro Khanna, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Kevin Kiley, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Young Kim, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Doug LaMalfa, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Barbara Lee, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mike Levin, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ted Lieu, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Doris Matsui, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Tom McClintock, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Kevin Mullin, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Grace Napolitano, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jay Obernolte, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jimmy Panetta, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Scott Peters, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Katie Porter, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Raul Ruiz, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Linda Sánchez, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Adam Schiff, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Brad Sherman, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Michelle Steel, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Eric Swalwell, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mark Takano, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mike Thompson, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Norma Torres, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable David Valadao, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Juan Vargas, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Maxine Waters, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives