



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

April 22, 2020

Bob Skinner  
President  
Public Lands Council  
1275 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 801  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Skinner:

Thank you for your letter of April 13, 2020, regarding USDA's response to the health and well-being of rural residents during the Coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. USDA shares your concerns about the effects of the coronavirus on your health and that of your family, as well as the effects on our work in the agriculture industry.

In February, President Trump established the Coronavirus Task Force and committed the full resources of the Federal government to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. Under the leadership of President Trump, my team at USDA has undertaken efforts across the board to ensure the safety and security of our food supply chain as well as the economic security of our rural communities. USDA is committed to serving the American people using the tools and authorities given to us by Congress and signed into law by the President, and we are working expeditiously to implement the CARES Act. Like you, we understand that the implementation process and services must be streamlined, which is why USDA Rural Development is in constant communication with our federal partners.

We appreciate your recognition of Rural Development's economic impact on the health and safety of rural communities. As you know, Rural Development plays a critical role in providing access to capital for essential healthcare facilities in our rural communities that enhance the quality of life for millions of Americans. From the beginning of this pandemic, Rural Development has worked expeditiously to take several actions to help rural residents, businesses, and communities affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. USDA is assessing and extending financial flexibilities for borrowers utilizing certain guaranteed and direct lending programs who are facing financial hardships, as well as extending the application deadlines for various programs.

Beginning immediately and through September 30, 2020, the USDA Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program (B&I), Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program, and Water and Waste Guaranteed Program lenders may assist borrowers experiencing temporary cash flow issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, by deferring payments for a period no longer than 180 days from the date the original payment is due. The lender must notify the Agency in writing of any payment deferments. Further, we have suspended several requirements that applicants and borrowers adhere to when working with our three agencies; more information may be found at the link below.

Additionally, the CARES Act provided Rural Development with an additional \$25 million for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) program. The DLT program helps rural residents tap into the enormous potential of modern telecommunications and the internet for education and health care, two of the keys to economic and community development.

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During this health crisis, it is Rural Development's number one priority to remain steadfast in delivering essential services to the people in rural communities throughout this nation. We will continue to provide excellent customer service across our 47 Rural Development state offices and keep our customers, partners, and stakeholders continuously updated as more actions are taken to respond to COVID-19.

Again, we appreciate your focus on our Rural Development programs and know that we are working diligently to continue our mission of expanding economic opportunities to our customers who live and work in rural America. For additional information and future announcements, you can visit Rural Development's COVID-19 resource website at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/coronavirus>.

If you need further assistance, please have a member of your staff contact the Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 720-7095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonny Perdue". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "S" at the beginning.

Sonny Perdue  
Secretary

CC:

National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
American Sheep Industry Association