

March 27, 2023

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
U. S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
U. S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the undersigned coalition representing rural technical assistance providers, associations, environmental policy organizations, and private well and decentralized wastewater professionals, we respectfully ask for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Decentralized Water Systems Grant program to be fully funded at \$20 million for Fiscal Year 2024.

This USDA program has a track record of success in supporting loans and grants of up to \$15,000 to low-and moderate-income households in rural areas for the use of private water well and decentralized, onsite wastewater system installation, treatment, or upgrades in areas not served by a public utility.

The program received an expanded authorization in the *Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018*, allowing onsite wastewater recycling projects to also qualify for support. By expanding the program, it strengthens existing federal resources that can be used to assist in the financing of private wells, water treatment, and wastewater systems for those rural Americans most in need.

As you know, there are more than 15 million private wells that provide drinking water to over 47 million people. More than a million homes across the country lack adequate plumbing and nearly 200,000 homes lack a sewage system altogether, according to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Moreover, roughly 85 million Americans depend on decentralized septic systems to treat and manage their wastewater. The challenges facing rural communities are unique, as they often do not have the financial and technical resources available to larger municipalities, which makes expanded investment in this program so critical.

Providing the full funding of \$20 million to the Rural Decentralized Water Systems Grant program will protect the health and safety of Americans on private wells or septic systems, rural communities, and the source water they rely on each day. We look forward to working with your committee throughout the appropriations process to support the unique needs of rural Americans.

Sincerely