



March 28, 2012

Chairman Frank D. Lucas, Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Peterson and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Rural policy is driven in large part by the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill, however, covers much more than agriculture. Disability issues have generally had little consideration in the bill, with the exception of some attention to housing and technology (e.g. AgrAbility). It is time to change that, and infuse disability into relevant parts of this important rural legislation. This is why the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) believes that people with disabilities in rural America need to be recognized in the 2012 Farm Bill.

APRIL is a national membership organization dedicated to advancing the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities in rural America. We provide leadership and resources through a national network of rural centers for independent living, organizations and individuals concerned with the unique aspects of rural independent living. The goal of APRIL is to work with others to find solutions to common problems and to bring rural issues in independent living into focus on the national level.

Farmers and ranchers with disabilities were rightly recognized in 1990 with the creation of the AgrAbility programs. APRIL, and its members, work closely with the state and national program to insure farmers and ranchers with disabilities can remain in their vocation. We seek the same recognition for other rural people with disabilities in this bill.

The health and economic vibrancy of the rural American landscape affects everyone. This includes people with disabilities. Therefore, APRIL urges policy makers to specifically recognize people with disabilities in the reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

APRIL would urge policy makers to include people with disabilities in all sections of the bill relating to the titles on rural development. For example, in the current bill the section describing “underserved and disadvantaged” populations should specifically include people with disabilities in the list of populations mentioned.

Secondly, APRIL urges members of Congress to fulfill its promise to rural people with disabilities seeking employment. In 2008 the bill included a new program in Title VI, Subtitle A, Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, specifically section 6023.

The short title defined the new program:

**The Secretary shall make grants to nonprofit organizations, or to a consortium of nonprofit organizations, to expand and enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in rural areas;**

And,

**AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section \$2,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012.’’.**

While section 6023 was authorized in the bill and a recommendation of the proposed level of appropriations was included in the bill, no appropriation was ever made, and rules to establish the program were not promulgated.

This reauthorization creates an opportunity for policy makers to be inclusive of all rural Americans as we strive to strengthen our communities.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Altom", with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Billy Altom, Executive Director  
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