



**Indiana Farm Bureau**<sup>®</sup>  
*Advocating for Agriculture*

Statement from Indiana Farm Bureau

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Testimony presented by Kendell Culp  
Vice President, Indiana Farm Bureau; Board of Directors, American Soybean  
Association; State Representative, Indiana's 16<sup>th</sup> District

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Small Business

Hearing on Rural Entrepreneurship: Examining the Challenges and State of Rural  
Small Businesses

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Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the challenges our rural communities and their small businesses face. My name is Kendell Culp and I testify in front of you today as the Vice President of Indiana Farm Bureau. In addition to this role, I serve on the American Soybean Association Board of Directors and have the honor of representing my rural community and Indiana's 16<sup>th</sup> District as a State Representative.

I live and farm in Rensselaer, Indiana, a rural community of just over six thousand residents at the heart of Jasper County. I farm with my father, my wife Tammy, and my son Brandon. We raise corn, soybeans, beef cattle, and hogs. We also operate Culp Family Farms meat sales and catering service. I've also served on the Jasper County Drainage Board, the Jasper County Economic Development Board, and was elected to serve as a Jasper County Commissioner. I believe I can give a unique perspective on the challenges rural communities are facing through the experience I've gained while serving in these roles.

## **Key Challenges for rural communities and their small business**

### 1. Planning for the future

The 2020 Census showed just how dire the situation is in rural America. Across the country, rural communities have seen a decline in population while urban communities and their suburbs have seen growth. According to the 2020 Census, 53% of Indiana's counties lost population. This matches the national average and shows that the decline in population in our rural communities is a problem that must be addressed before we lose rural communities.

### 2. Access to reliable broadband

In order to attract small businesses, rural communities need access to reliable broadband. Today, internet access is a must for small businesses, and without a reliable connection they will miss out on the opportunities needed to survive and grow. Additionally, without reliable broadband our rural communities lose access to necessary resources like health care, government services, and education. Current and future generations of rural Americans will be left behind their fellow citizens if they are without affordable, high-speed broadband service that enables them to connect with local small business, health care, educational services, and government agencies. We are pleased to see Congress investing in broadband expansion in rural areas, most recently through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 which will provide Indiana with over \$800 million for broadband funding.

### 3. Attracting and maintaining a strong workforce

I'm sure this comes as no surprise to this Committee, but workforce challenges are at the forefront of every industry, every community, and every business, big or small. Coupled with a declining population in rural areas, rural workforce issues are compounded, and our small business owners are feeling the brunt of the problem. Jobs can't get filled, shops and restaurants are forced to reduce hours of operation, and small businesses that are so important to rural America are closing for good. We've seen this in Rensselaer, with our local restaurants reducing hours and even going out of business. We must not only retain the workforce we have, but also focus on attracting new workers to live and work in our communities. Fortunately, Indiana and Jasper County have taken several steps to attract and retain our workforce.

- **Workforce Development Investment.** The Indiana Legislature passed legislation for more workforce development dollars to schools to promote skilled workforce training and allow it to count for school credit. This allows the next generation to train in a profession of their choice and transition directly into the workforce once they've graduated. These are skilled, high paying jobs that often turn into the small businesses that are staples in our towns. As our population ages and our workforce retires, we must ensure we have enough skilled workers to provide the necessary services we all need in the years to come.
- **Childcare.** Like several counties in Indiana, Jasper County was a childcare desert, and young families were forced to travel more than forty-five minutes away if they needed childcare services. Fortunately, our community has a young family that is passionate about this issue and was willing to go to great lengths to find a solution. With the help of the city government, county government, and local businesses, Appleseed Childhood Education opened its doors earlier this year accommodating over 70 seats for children in the community. Appleseed serves as the model for how a community can pool resources to tackle an issue that will serve their community in the long run.
- **Other Quality of Life Amenities.** Finally, we must focus on quality-of-life amenities. Along with access to reliable broadband and childcare services, communities must focus on other quality-of-life amenities services in their community. Does the community have a quality school system? Does it have access to healthcare and emergency services? Is there enough housing to match the workforce demand and your planned growth? Does it have the road, water and utility infrastructure necessary to accommodate the residents? All these questions must be addressed to attract and retain the workforce that our communities need.

## **Rural Development in the 2023 Farm Bill**

The rural development title of the farm bill has been included since 1973 and helps rural communities fund broadband investment, improve rural healthcare, and build community and economic development programs, water and wastewater treatment systems, and assistance for rural businesses. The farm bill impacts the well-being of all Americans and while it is not a fix to all the challenges our rural communities are facing, rural development programs are an important tool in the toolbox for communities to use as they plan. I encourage Congress to pass a bipartisan 2023 farm bill on time so that we do not lose access to the programs we depend on.

## **What can the federal government do?**

I consistently hear about the need to simplify the federal grant process. Whether it's a local farmer, a small business owner, or a passionate parent that wants to open a childcare facility, the message is the same. Grant and loan applications are too burdensome for the average small business owner and the process is often too time consuming to make it worth the trouble. Even worse, too often those that could use these grants and loans the most may not even know these resources exist or where to look for assistance.

We must also ensure that the dollars allocated for rural communities are going to serve the communities they were intended to serve. This is not unique to federal government. The Indiana legislature will pass large bills that allocate tax dollars to important services and programs but fail to

ensure the dollars are allocated appropriately. We must all do a better job of ensuring the legislation we pass are serving the communities in need.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Rural communities are the backbone of this nation and open discussions like this will allow us to find solutions to the challenges they face. I greatly appreciate your time and the important work you do as representatives in Congress. I truly love living and working in my rural community and it is my greatest honor to represent my District every day. I look forward to answering your questions and discussing some of the challenges our communities, and their small business, are facing.