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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I write concerning the February 27 announcement of the USDA's intention to approve closure of the Farm Service Agency office in Grant County, Oregon starting in late May. In light of the adverse impact of following through with these intentions, I ask you to strongly consider providing regular FSA staff office hours in an existing public office space in John Day as an alternative in the event of closure. Many area farmers and ranchers currently utilize the Grant County office in John Day; therefore, completely eliminating service there could require round trip travel of 150 miles or more to reach the nearest county FSA office.

Although I appreciate your efforts to rein in spending and make necessary changes to improve efficiencies and reduce overall operating costs at USDA, I am concerned that there are no plans in place to provide those in rural Grant County with reasonably accessible and regular FSA service should closure of the Grant County office be finalized. Representing a congressional district that covers nearly 70,000 square miles, I want to be sure that the agency does its best to maintain necessary FSA services that farmers and ranchers rely on for their operations.

With limited timber supply from federal lands to fuel wood products industry jobs in Grant County, agriculture and ranching provide the main basis for the local economy. From USDA loans to federal crop insurance and other farm and conservation programs, FSA helps keep farmers and ranchers operating and supporting the local economy's jobs. These and other services provided by the FSA need to remain accessible. Providing regular office hours is an alternative that would accomplish this, while allowing the FSA to reduce its operating costs.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue for Grant County farmers and ranchers.

Best regards,

Greg Walden
Member of Congress