

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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September 9, 2021

Mr. Zach Ducheneaux
Administrator
Farm Service Agency
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Ducheneaux:

Countless farmers in our districts have reached out concerned about staffing shortages in their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. As their representatives and Members of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, we want to work with the current administration to equip FSA to meet the needs of farmers.

As our farmers progress through the planting season and into the harvesting season in the fall, it is important that the FSA office is adequately staffed. The direct interaction that many of our farmers have in these offices cannot be substituted with only emails and phone calls. Further, lengthy processing times are causing problems for many farmers. While we understand that processing times vary between counties, it is important to avoid unnecessary delays for these applications.

We were encouraged to receive notice from FSA at the beginning of the year that it had hired 165 permanent federal, 250 permanent non-federal, and 435 temporary employees during the pandemic. Similarly, we are encouraged that local FSA offices are allowing visitors back into the office and 75 percent of staff are working in the office. However, we are still hearing from farmers that there are shortages in various offices. The FSA offices exist to serve in the communities where they are located. It is hard to accomplish that goal when staffing levels in these offices remain low. It is our interest to work in good faith and learn about the challenges and needs of the FSA and the local offices.

In order to ensure the FSA offices are able to provide adequate support for farmers, please respond to the following questions and provide the following documents and information no later than Sept. 23, 2021:

1. A narrative explaining what the agency can do to process farmers' reports and forms faster.

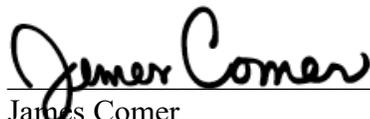
2. Documents showing the impact of the 18-member county-level hiring and processing team on hiring.
3. A detailed explanation of the onboarding process for non-federal FSA staff through the FSA business center.
4. The length of time to onboard a non-federal FSA staff person through the FSA business center.
5. An explanation of whether the FSA business center onboarding process has expedited the hiring process.
6. In 2018, USDA completed an Optimal Productive Office study to better inform the agency on hiring. What level of staffing is needed nationwide, based on this study, to boost productivity?
7. When can we expect FSA offices to be fully reopened?
8. Has there been discussion on allowing FSA offices to fully-reopen in states that have removed their COVID-19 restrictions? If not, why?
9. When will the Administration name appointees to serve as FSA State Executive Directors?

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry. Thank you for your consideration and for your assistance to farmers in our districts. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Michael Cloud
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic and
Consumer Policy



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Jody Hice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government
Operations



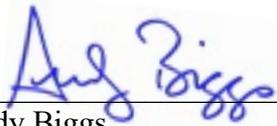
Pete Sessions
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights
and Civil Liberties



Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress



Clay Higgins
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



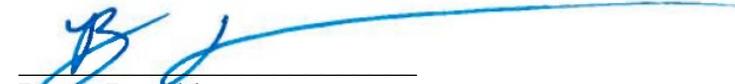
Andrew S. Clyde
Member of Congress



Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress



Yvette Herrell
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties