

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1803

February 9, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reconsider its proposed closure of the St. Mary Parish Farm Services Agency (FSA) facility. I believe the Department has not completed a full fiscal analysis of this closure and when additional information is considered, the Department will see closure of this facility is not justified.

The USDA's official release announcing the closures of 259 domestic offices on January 9 stated this closure was designed as an effort to eliminate government waste and to be better stewards of taxpayers' dollars. While I certainly agree we must seek out waste, fraud and abuse, I also believe that we must also honor the commitments we in the Federal government have made to the taxpayer and to our local government partners. Additionally, we must take utmost care to ensure our decisions are fiscally prudent in both the short and long term. I believe the decision to close the St. Mary Parish facility does not meet these tests.

First, I believe the 20 mile air distance between office limit is an arbitrary line, one which does not reflect South Louisiana's unique geography. And I note that the St. Mary Parish FSA office does not even fall below this arbitrary line. The office is over 20 miles away from the nearest office. In fact, this facility is 21 miles away from the facility in Iberia Parish, 57.7 miles from the shared Lafourche Parish FSA that services Lafourche, Terrebonne, and Assumption FSA parishes, and 49.9 miles from the office in St. Martin Parish. As such, the closure of this office does not fit the Department's stated criteria.

Additionally, the FSA Parish office model works because these offices are often co-located with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) parish level office, thus producers are provided a "one stop shop" for all of their USDA program needs. As closing the St. Mary Parish FSA will remove the co-location with the St. Mary (NRCS) office this closure will negatively affect farmers who will now have to go to two separate locations instead of a one stop shop. Furthermore, how will closing one USDA office but keeping open the co-located USDA office open result in any real savings?

Considering all of these factors and the apparent lack of investigation into the closure of the St. Mary FSA office, I urge the USDA for a halt to any efforts to close this office until a full

analysis has been completed. In the interim, I respectfully request that the Department send all information concerning this closure to my office.

In regards to the Lafayette FSA, it is my understanding that the facility's closure has the support of local producers. The facility is only staffed by a few employees and its location within the city limits is known to be inconvenient for many. Most importantly, its closure will allow the St. Martin Parish FSA to finally receive the support structure it deserves to flourish and adequately assist the producers of Acadiana.

I thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this request and look forward to your timely response.

Respectfully,



Jeff Landry  
Member of Congress