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**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Agriculture**  
**Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry**  
**Room 1301, Longworth House Office Building**  
**Washington, DC 20515-6001**

(202) 225-2171  
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February 16, 2011

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you know, forestry and the associated industry is a keystone in rural communities across America. The industry provides good-paying jobs and economic development to rural communities while sustaining clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities.

Most of America's wood products, roughly 92 percent, are grown on privately-owned and family-owned forests in the U.S. These owners work everyday to keep their forests intact and healthy; however they face constant economic pressure to convert their land to other uses. Markets for wood products encourage forest owners to keep their forests healthy and keep forests as forests. In addition, markets for wood products can help improve our public lands, which currently face unprecedented forest health challenges.

We are concerned that several USDA policies governing building construction are working counter to these private landowners and the rural communities and economic benefits that they sustain. Specifically, we are concerned that USDA currently has a policy that promotes the use of the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. LEED discourages the use of wood products in building construction. Additionally, LEED favors wood produced under only one forest certification system, which happens to source much of its wood overseas. Equally troubling, the USDA Forest Service's policy mandates the use of the LEED rating system for new building construction.

Unlike many other agriculture products, USDA does little to promote the use of wood products, either within the Department's own programs or outside the Department to other federal agencies, state governments, or the private sector. This puts American-made wood products at a grave disadvantage, when compared to other countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Canada that are actively promoting the use of their wood products. Given this background, USDA's current promotion of LEED further places American wood products at a distinct disadvantage when compare to our international counterparts.

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We respectfully request that USDA amend its policies toward wood products, so that American wood products are no longer placed at a competitive disadvantage. Additionally, we ask that USDA develop a strategy to promote the use of wood products. Further we request that USDA provide specific ways it plans to achieve these goals. We look forward to your response. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



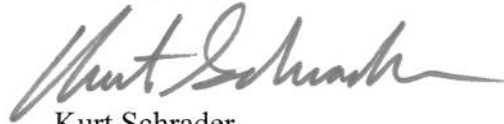
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