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**Urban and Rural America: Unleashing Possibility in Partnership**

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*This column was co-authored with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack.*

*"We recognize, understand and appreciate that rural and urban America are interconnected and interdependent. Working together, we can leverage more investment and cooperation to achieve greater results."*

A few weeks ago in New York City, the two of us had an opportunity to visit about expanding partnerships between the National Urban League and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

At first blush, our organizations work in different areas of the country on different issues. The Department of Agriculture does a great deal of work in the small towns and communities that make up rural America, but often is not associated with urban parts of the country. The National Urban League has achieved tremendous results over its 103-year-history to achieve economic empowerment for people in our cities – but often is not associated with rural America.

We had this discussion because we are united in a belief that in a world with more priorities and limited resources, partnership is more important today than ever before. America is bigger than the sum of its many parts, and as we look to fuel the economic recovery, partnership is more important than ever before. Leaders across our nation, from government agencies at every level, to non-profit organizations, to the business community, must branch out and expand our work together if we are to keep up economic growth.

While folks may think that a divide exists between rural and urban America, the fact is that we depend on one another for economic growth.

America's farms and ranches provide more than 80 percent of the food we consume in the United States, and provide for agricultural exports that support more than one million jobs – many of them in our largest cities. Meanwhile, the work happening in America's cities, from

small businesses to companies in nearly every field, add value and demand for products from rural America. New advancements in biobased products promise to further this connection.

For example, auto manufacturers are creating car parts from soybean foam that replaces petroleum-based products – increasing value for soybean producers and giving vehicle manufacturers a way to produce a biobased product in city factories. Ford Motor Company has already used more than 62 million pounds of soybeans in manufacturing. Dasani, the bottled water distributor, now uses bottles made from corn-based plastic. Ohio State University is researching ways to use waste from hog farms to produce asphalt. The possibilities are truly endless – and such advancement holds promise in every corner of the U.S. economy.

We know there's an opportunity to strengthen connections like these that build on the strengths of communities everywhere in the nation. We recognize, understand and appreciate that rural and urban America are interconnected and interdependent. Working together, we can leverage more investment and cooperation to achieve greater results.

All of this work has the same key goal: to build up economic capacity and opportunity for Americans. In the coming months, we hope to further explore opportunities for USDA and the National Urban League to work together.

We hope that our first meeting in New York City was just the beginning of a lasting partnership and further cooperation. We look forward to penning similar notes to this one on our progress in the future.

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