USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Broadband Resources for Rural America

Created by the USDA Rural Development Innovation Center

Together, America Prospers

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Why is High-speed Broadband Important to Rural America?

Affordable, reliable broadband internet service is fundamental to modern American life. It ensures rural schoolchildren have equal access to comprehensive educational opportunities, and allows rural communities to provide the best health outcomes – at reasonable cost – to their residents. High-speed internet service stimulates job creation and sparks innovation that enhances rural economic development. This is why USDA remains focused on – and committed to – rural broadband expansion.

Rural broadband is the digital superhighway for today and tomorrow. Just as rural electrification and telephone networks revolutionized the United States in the 20th century, we are now witnessing a significant transformation as a result of rural broadband expansion. In today's information-driven global economy, high-speed broadband isn't just an amenity, it's essential to safeguarding America's economic competitiveness, and to ensuring all citizens equal access to opportunity. The economic benefits of broadband internet are significant not just for productivity, but also for education, health care, and public safety.

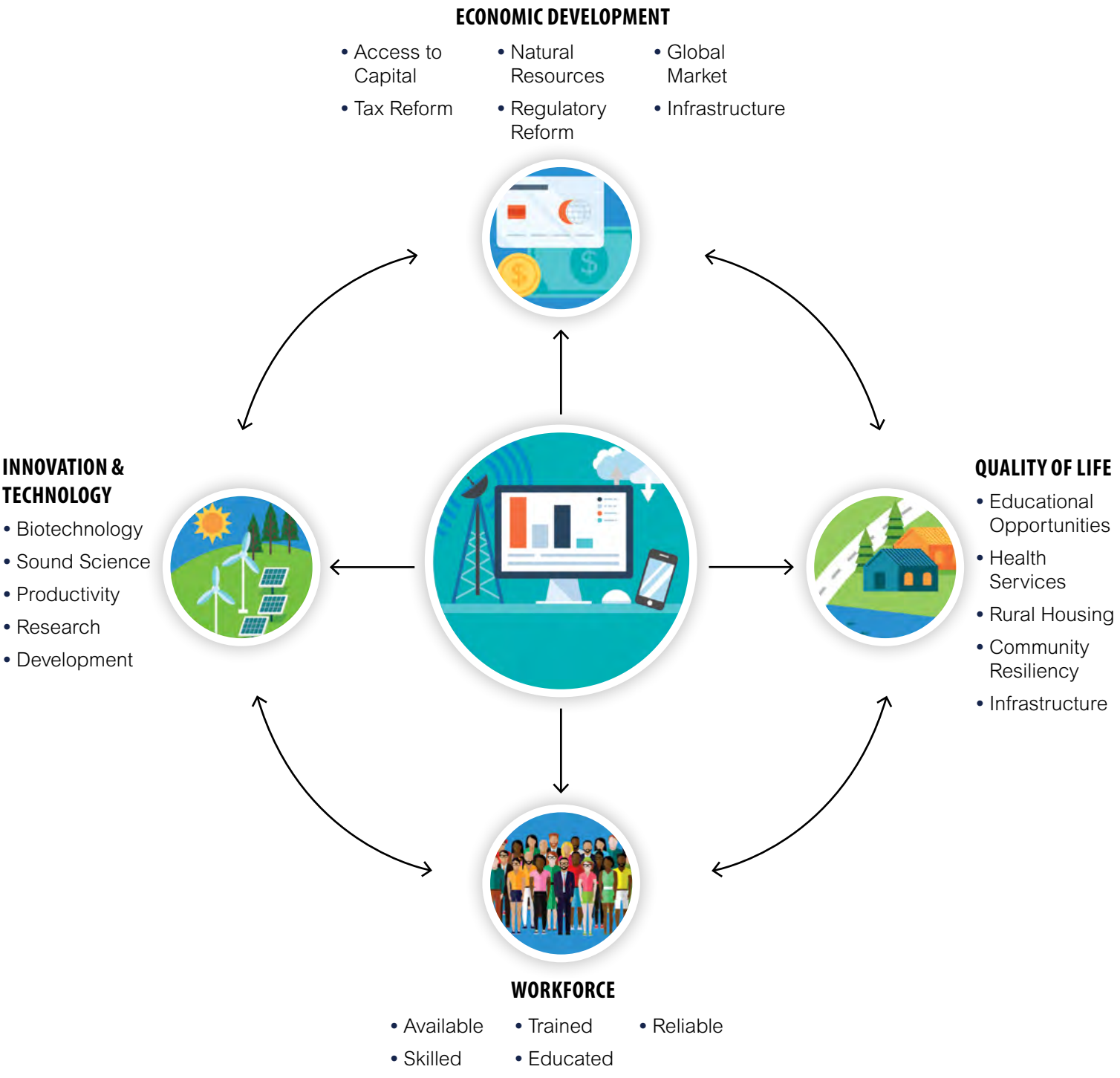
Our challenge is to help connect the estimated 46 million people – spread across 72 percent of our land – who call rural America "home."

In contrast to their urban neighbors with broadband, many rural Americans can't experience full workplace productivity, or access modern, interactive education or quality health care. Rural business and industry relies on solid internet connections to buy and sell products, process transactions, and post job opportunities. Additionally, in order to promote a skilled workforce, employers need access to specialized training and professional development resources. More often than not, these are found online.

Without a robust, home-based connection, rural school children cannot readily access digital resources. Many travel to public, mobile "hotspots" – often, in fast food parking lots – to complete online homework assignments and other activities.

Finally, access to medical services – including telemedicine – is also limited where broadband service is deficient. Rural patients often must drive long distances to the closest provider, creating additional time and financial burdens.

Our country has the tools to close this digital gap, and we must continue to pursue internet access parity with the urgency it demands.



Rural broadband access isn't just a federal issue. All rural stakeholders – federal, state, Tribal, and local – must seek partnerships that promote innovation and infrastructure modernization. Because *Together, America Prospers*.

Illustrating USDA's Role in Bringing Broadband to Rural Places

USDA's mission is to provide leadership on agriculture, food and nutrition, rural development, natural resources, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management.

USDA's Rural Utilities Service oversees Rural Development's telecommunication programs – the traditional source for broadband funding in rural America.

In recent years, $690 million has been appropriated annually under the Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Loan Guarantee Program to provide or enhance telephone and broadband service in rural areas. Additional broadband loan and grant funds are being used to foster private-public partnerships to expand high-speed internet service, including $216 million allocated to the Distance Learning and Telemedicine program in the past three years, alone.

Authorized by the Consolidated Budget Act of 2018, the ReConnect program has helped deploy rural broadband to more than 30 states through 181 awarded projects totaling $1.51 billion. The Reconnect regulation (7 CFR 1740) became effective on April 27, 2021.

It's important to note that more than 20 other USDA programs can be leveraged in support of rural broadband deployment. USDA helps bridge the gap between broadband infrastructure and its end-use by:

- → Supporting technology research
- → Improving digital skills
- → Building broadband access expansion capacity
- → Funding associated costs such as environmental, engineering, and archeological permitting
- → Supporting access to necessary broadband equipment
- → Renovating essential community facilities

For instance:

- A farmer can partner with a local university to undertake agricultural technology research.
- A cooperative can access USDA funding to improve technology skills and buy equipment necessary for innovative farming practices such as precision agriculture.
- A local government can finance broadband development planning and build partnerships to finance broadband infrastructure development using various USDA-funded programs.
- A county hospital can commission a feasibility study to determine how to best incorporate telemedicine into its services, and then fund equipment and facilities necessary for the expansion.

Through direct and guaranteed loans, intermediary relending programs, and grants, USDA offers substantial opportunities to finance projects with reasonable terms.

Other U.S. Government departments support rural broadband expansion with loans and grants for equipment procurement, technical assistance, and planning support.

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) offers additional resources on its BroadbandUSA web page, available at this link: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/. Resources include a broadband community planning toolkit, archived webinars on various broadband topics, and information about state-based broadband programs.

The resource matrix in this toolkit illustrates how USDA programs across our mission areas and agencies align to support a holistic approach to the development and deployment of broadband technology. However, each program has its own eligibility criteria and priorities that must be taken into consideration when determining how to finance each project.

USDA Rural Broadband Resource Matrix

USDA offers more than 20 programs to fund planning, construction, and research for rural broadband activities. More information can be found at usda.gov/broadband.

How to Use the USDA Rural Broadband Resource Matrix

STEP 1) Identify the type of customer (matrix rows) applying and match it with the type of project (matrix columns) the community needs.

STEP 2) Review the list of resources applicable to your customer and project types. To get more information on each resource, click and follow the link to the relevant website.

STEP 3) Reach out to the USDA specialist associated with each resource whose contact information can be found online at the locations listed below.

STEP 4) Discuss the eligibility of your project(s) and the application process with the USDA specialist to ensure feasibility.

STEP 5) Develop an application timeline for your project, closely review requirements, and then proceed with the application process.

STEP 6) If you have questions, you can follow up with your USDA specialist at any time during the process, even after submission.

Here is a list of specialists that can help you get started:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture: Use the NIFA grant database to find contacts for NIFA grant programs.

Natural Resources Conservation Service: Contact your local NRCS Service Center to learn more about conservation opportunities.

Farm Service Agency: Contact your local FSA Service Center to learn more about programs for farmers and ranchers.

Forest Service: Visit the FS Special-Use Permits site to learn more about use of FS lands.

Rural Development: Contact your local RD state office or Telecom General Field Representative to learn more about RD loan, grant, and technical assistance programs.

Partnerships: Contact USDA's Office of Partnership and Public Engagement for partnership opportunities with USDA.

Community Solutions: Contact the Rural Development Innovation Center for creative solutions to your rural community's broadband needs.

Office of Tribal Relations (OTR): Serves as a single point of contact for Tribal issues, and works to ensure relevant programs and policies are accessible, efficient, easy to understand, and developed in consultation with the American Indians and Alaska Native constituents they impact. More information is available at this link: https://www.usda.gov/tribalrelations.

For resources at other federal agencies, visit the Department of Commerce's BroadbandUSA site.

USDA Rural Broadband Resource Matrix

Customers:	Agriculture Technology Research: Innovative farming research using broadband technology	Technical Assistance, Training, and Workforce Development: Sharing information, expertise, instruction, and skills training in broadband technology use	Planning: Needs assessment, formation of broadband development plans, or business plans
Farmers & Ranchers: Individuals who operate a farm or ranch	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program	4c) Agriculture Conservation Easement Program 4a) Agricultural Management Assistance 4e) Conservation Stewardship Program 4f) Conservation Technical Assistance Program 4g) Conservation Innovation Grants 4d) Environmental Quality Incentives Program 4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program 3a) Direct Operating Loans 3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3d) Guaranteed Farm Loans 3c) Farm Microloans	3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3d) Guaranteed Farm Loans 3c) Farm Microloans 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees
For-profit Businesses: Corporations, Limited Liability Companies, Competitive and Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers, Sole Proprietorships, among others	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative 2c) National Robotics Initiative 2.0 2d) Cyber-Physical Systems Grant Program	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Foundational and Applied Science Program	1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees
Government Entities: State or local governments, federally-recognized Tribes, or Tribal organizations	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative 2c) National Robotics Initiative 2.0 2d) Cyber-Physical Systems Grant Program	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 4g) Conservation Innovation Grants 4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program 1f) Rural Business Development Grants 1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants	1f) Rural Business Development Grants 1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees
Cooperatives and Nonprofits: Telecom and electric co-ops, private, nonprofit schools, hospitals, libraries, and faith-based organizations, among others	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative 2c) National Robotics Initiative 2.0 2d) Cyber-Physical Systems Grant Program	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 4g) Conservation Innovation Grants 4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Foundational and Applied Science Program 1f) Rural Business Development Grants 1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants	1f) Rural Business Development Grants 1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees
Universities and Institutes of Higher Learning: Community colleges, technology institutes, and vocational schools, among others	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative 2c) National Robotics Initiative 2.0 2d) Cyber-Physical Systems Grant Program	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program 4g) Conservation Innovation Grants 4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Foundational and Applied Science Program 1f) Rural Business Development Grants 1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants	1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees
Private Lenders: Banks, credit unions, and intermediary lenders, among others	2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative	2b) Sustainable Agriculture Program	1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees

For Planning, Construction, Research, and Other Projects and Activities

Permits: Reimbursement for environmental, engineering, and archeological permits	**Broadband Infrastructure:** Network plant and extension of broadband systems through fiber, poles, communication towers, wireless equipment, and so on	**Buying, improving, or renting end-use equipment:** constructing community centers and wireless access points, and so on	**Refinancing:** New financing with a different provider for an existing debt owed
3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3d) Guaranteed Farm Loans 3c) Farm Microloans 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3d) Guaranteed Farm Loans 3c) Farm Microloans 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	4a) Agricultural Management Assistance 4g) Conservation Innovation Grants 4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program 3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3a) Farm Operating Loans 3c) Farm Microloans 1g) Business & Industry Loan Guarantees	3b) Farm Ownership Loans 3d) Guaranteed Farm Loans 3c) Farm Microloans 1g) Business & Industry Loan Guarantees
1d) Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans 1c) Rural Broadband Access Loans 1k) ReConnect Program 1a) Community Connect Grants 5a) Forest Service Special Use Permits 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	1d) Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans 1c) Rural Broadband Access Loans 1k) ReConnect Program 1a) Community Connect Grants 1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees	1d) Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans 1c) Rural Broadband Access Loans 1k) ReConnect Program 1a) Community Connect Grants 1g) Business & Industry Loan Guarantees 1e) Rural Economic Development Loans & Grants 2e) Small Business Innovation Research Program	1d) Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans 1c) Rural Broadband Access Loans 1g) Business & Industry Loan Guarantees
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USDA Agency and Resource Descriptions

1) Rural Development

Rural Development offers programs designed to holistically improve the rural economy by financing infrastructure, business, housing, and essential community facilities projects. While telecom infrastructure programs directly fund the planning, development, and end-use of broadband infrastructure, other programs that develop essential community facilities and grow businesses also can be used to finance facets of rural broadband deployment. Examples include conducting broadband needs assessments, preparing broadband development plans, purchasing equipment, and acquiring or upgrading public internet access facilities such as schools and libraries.

1a) Community Connect Grants

The Community Connect program helps fund broadband deployment in rural communities where it is not yet economically viable for private-sector providers to deliver service. The grants offer financial assistance to eligible service providers that will construct, improve, or expand broadband networks in rural areas.

1b) Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine program helps rural communities use telecommunications to connect to each other and to the world, overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density. For example, this program can link teachers and medical service providers in one area to students and patients in another.

1c) Rural Broadband Access Loans

The Rural Broadband Access Loan program provides loans and loan guarantees to fund the cost of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment necessary to provide high-speed broadband service in eligible rural areas.

1d) Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans

The Telecommunications Infrastructure program provides financing for the construction, maintenance, improvement and expansion of telephone service and broadband in rural areas.

1e) Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants

The Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program provides funding for rural projects through local utility organizations. USDA provides zero-interest loans to local utilities which, in turn through to local businesses (“ultimate recipients”) for project that will create and retain employment in rural areas. The ultimate recipients then repay the lending utility directly, and the utility is responsible for repaying USDA.

1f) Rural Business Development Grant Program

The Rural Business Development program offers a competitive grant designed to support targeted technical assistance, training, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that will employ 50 or fewer new employees and earn less than $1 million in gross revenue. Programmatic activities are separated into enterprise or opportunity-type grant activities.

1g) Business and Industry Loan Guarantees

The Business and Industry program bolsters the availability of private credit by guaranteeing loans for rural businesses. This program improves the economic health of rural communities by increasing access to business capital through loan guarantees that enable commercial lenders to provide affordable financing for businesses in eligible rural areas.

1h) Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grants

The Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training program provides associations with technical assistance and training with respect to essential community facilities programs. Furthermore, it helps communities, federally-recognized Tribes, and nonprofit corporations identify and plan for existing regional community facility needs. Once those needs are identified, the grantee can help find additional public and private resources to support the community.

1i) Community Facilities Loans and Grants

The Community Facilities program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a "facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of that community in a primarily rural area, and does not include private, commercial, or business undertakings."

1j) Community Facilities Guaranteed Loans

This program provides loan guarantees to eligible private lenders to help build essential community facilities in rural areas.

1k) ReConnect Program Loans and Grants

This program offers loans, loan and grant combinations, and grants for the construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities that provide high-speed internet services to customers' premises using technologies suitable for the terrain and types of internet use the rural community needs. A rural area is eligible if it currently lacks sufficient access to broadband.

2) National Institute of Food and Agriculture

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provides leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculture-related sciences. NIFA applies an integrated approach to ensure that groundbreaking discoveries in agriculture-related sciences and technologies reach the people who can put them into practice. Programs can be used to conduct research that uses broadband technology (for example, precision agriculture) to enhance agricultural production performance. NIFA's programs can also be used for education and training as well as for the implementation of innovative technologies to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of American agriculture.

2a) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative – Foundational and Applied Science

The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative is the nation's leading competitive grants program for agricultural sciences. The Foundational and Applied Science program focuses on building a foundation of fundamental and applied knowledge in food and agricultural sciences critical for solving current and future societal challenges. The goal of this program is to invest in agricultural production research, education, and extension projects for more sustainable, productive, and economically-viable plant and animal production systems. Grants are awarded in six Farm Bill priority areas: Plant Health and Production and Plant Products; Animal Health and Production and Animal Products; Food Safety, Nutrition, and Health; Natural Resources, and Environment; Agriculture Systems and Technology; and Agriculture Economics and Rural Communities.

2b) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education – Professional Development

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program provides training, grants, and resources for agricultural professionals to build awareness, knowledge, and skills related to sustainable agriculture concepts. The program includes two key components: (1) competitive grants awarded at the regional level for the development of training curricula, outreach efforts, communications projects and similar work and (2) a network of state coordinators, working part-time for the program in each state and island protectorate, who hold workshops and field days to share sustainable practices and research results, provide travel scholarships for ag professionals to attend training events, and generally serve as sustainable agriculture resources in their state.

2c) National Robotics Initiative 3.0: Innovations in Integration of Robotics

The National Robotics Initiative 3.0: Innovations in Integration of Robotics (NRI-3.0) program builds upon the preceding National Robotics Initiative (NRI) programs to support fundamental research in the United States that will advance the science of robot integration. The program supports research that promotes integration of robots to the benefit of humans including safety and human independence.

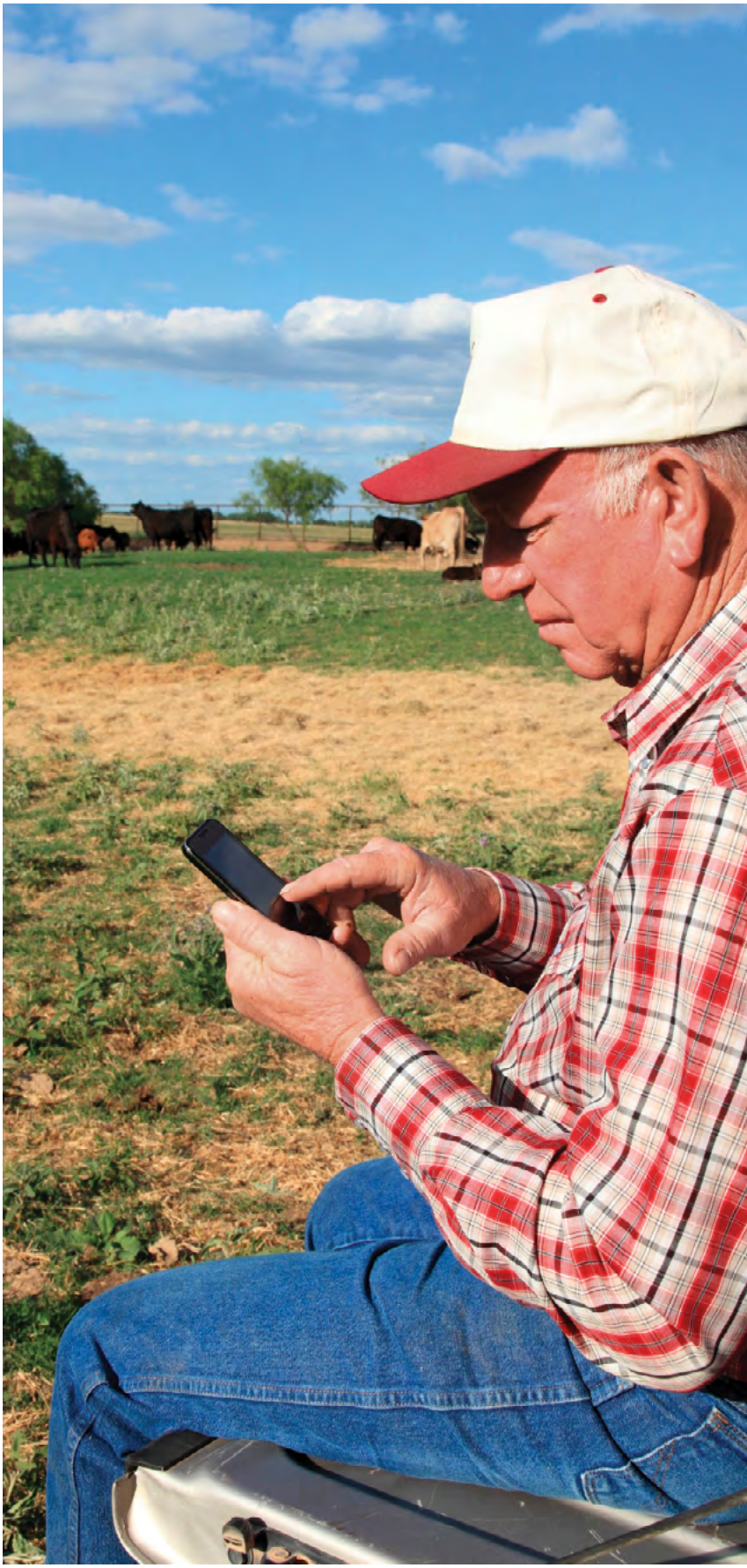
Collaboration between academic, industry, non-profit, and other organizations is encouraged to establish better linkages between fundamental science and engineering and technology development, deployment, and use.

2d) Cyber-Physical Systems (Joint National Science Foundation) Competitive Grant

The goal of the Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) program is to develop the core system science needed to engineer complex cyber-physical systems people can use or interact with and depend upon. These are engineered systems built from, and dependent upon, the seamless integration of computational algorithms and physical components. Advances in CPS will enable capability, adaptability, scalability, resiliency, safety, security, reliability, and usability that will far exceed the simple embedded systems of today. Furthermore, they will transform the way people interact with engineered systems - just as the internet has transformed the way people interact with information. New smart CPS will drive innovation and competition in sectors such as agriculture, energy, transportation, building design and automation, healthcare, and manufacturing.

2e) Small Business Innovation Research

The Small Business Innovation Research program offers competitively-awarded grants to qualified small businesses to support high-quality research related to important scientific problems and opportunities in agriculture that could lead to significant public benefits. The program stimulates technological innovations in the private sector and strengthens the role of federal research and development in support of small businesses. The program also fosters and encourages participation by women-owned and socially- or economically-disadvantaged small businesses.



3) Farm Service Agency

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides America's farmers and ranchers with a financial safety net, while also helping protect natural resources and enhancing food security. FSA offers loan funds to farmers, ranchers, and those starting a career in agriculture. An increase is evident in the borrowers' use of loan funds for the purpose of investing in technology and innovative improvements in farming and ranching operations. Examples include Global Positioning System (GPS) units and software, seed technology, drone technology, management software (fiscal, herd, and so on), and related precision agriculture improvements.

3a) Direct Operating Loans

Direct Operating Loans are used to purchase livestock and feed, farm equipment, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance, and family living expenses; make minor improvements or repairs to buildings and fencing; and fund general farm operating expenses. For new agricultural producers, direct farm operating loans provide an essential gateway into agricultural production by financing the cost of operating a farm.

3b) Direct Farm Ownership Loans

Direct Farm Ownership Loans are used to purchase or enlarge a farm or ranch, construct new or improve existing farm or ranch buildings, and for soil and water conservation and protection purposes. There are no current or previous farm ownership requirements, and 100 percent financing is available. Direct farm ownership loans are a valuable resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

3c) Farm Microloans

Farm Microloans are direct farm ownership and operating loans focused on the financing needs of small and beginning farmers, as well as niche and non-traditional farm operations. These can include truck farms, farms participating in direct marketing and sales (such as farmers markets or Community Supported Agriculture), restaurants and grocery stores, or those using hydroponic, aquaponic, organic, and vertical growing methods. Microloans feature a shortened application process and reduced paperwork.

3d) Guaranteed Loans

Guaranteed Loans enable lenders to extend credit to family farm operators and owners who do not qualify for standard commercial loans. Farmers receive credit at reasonable terms to finance their current operations or expand their business; financial institutions receive additional loan business and servicing fees, as well as other benefits from the program, such as protection from loss.

4) Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners across the country to help them boost agricultural productivity and protect our natural resources through conservation. Their approach combines locally-led solutions with science and research; landowner stewardship; partnerships; and proven conservation practices to produce results for agriculture and the environment. Landowners can apply to participate in programs that provide technical guidance and financial assistance to obtain and use technology equipment that requires connectivity. Examples include acquiring and using technology to conduct yield monitoring, grid soil sampling, remote-sensing applications, and drip irrigation.

4a) Agricultural Management Assistance

Agricultural Management Assistance provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations. Producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming. This program is available in 16 states where participation in the federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

4b) Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales. Through the program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved.

4c) The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Community Connect Grants

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Over the past 25 years, NRCS has worked with landowners to protect more than 4.4 million acres of wetlands and agricultural lands, a value of over a billion dollars in a diversified real estate portfolio that has resulted in improved soil health, water and air quality and wildlife habitat. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps federally-recognized Tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

4d) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

From weather to pests, and from a lack of time to markets, each American farmer faces a unique set of challenges. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps agricultural producers confront those challenges – all while conserving natural resources like soil, water, and air. This voluntary conservation program helps producers make conservation work for them. Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations. Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil, and better wildlife habitats, all while improving agricultural operations. Through EQIP, you can voluntarily implement conservation practices, and NRCS co-invests in these practices with you.

4e) Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps producers build on existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operations. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop yields, or develop wildlife habitat, NRCS can custom design a CSP plan to help meet those goals. NRCS can further help schedule the timely planting of cover crops, develop a grazing plan that will improve a forage base, implement no-till to reduce erosion, or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat.

4f) Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA)

The voluntary Conservation Technical Assistance Program delivers conservation technical assistance and is available to any group or individual interested in conserving natural resources and sustaining agricultural production. The program functions through a national network of locally-based, professional conservationists located in nearly every county of the United States.

4g) Conservation Innovation Grants

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that drive public and private-sector innovation in resource conservation. Authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, CIG uses Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds to award competitive grants to non-federal or nongovernmental organizations, federally-recognized Tribes, or individuals. Through the program, public and private grantees develop the tools, technologies, and strategies to support next-generation conservation efforts on working lands and develop market-based solutions to resource challenges. CIG projects inspire creative problem-solving that boosts production on farms, ranches, and private forests, ultimately improving water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat. Annually, a portion of CIG funding is set aside for projects that support historically-underserved, new and beginning, as well as military veteran producers in farming and ranching.

5) Forest Service

The Forest Service, part of USDA, manages National Forest System (NFS) lands comprised of 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands in 43 states as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Forest Service currently administers more than 4,000 special use authorizations for communications uses (wired and wireless). NFS lands contribute to our nation's telecommunications needs by authorizing uses that provide critical services to rural communities and urban areas. The facilities included in these authorizations support more than 10,000 wireless uses and 563 wired uses (fiber optic rights-of-way).

5a) Special Use Permits

Each year, the Forest Service receives thousands of individual and business applications for authorization for use of NFS land for such activities as water transmission, agriculture, outfitting and guiding, recreation, telecommunication, research, photography and video productions, and granting road and utility rights-of-ways. The Forest Service carefully reviews each application to determine how the request affects the public's use of NFS land. Today, our growing population and mobile society have created a demand for a variety of uses of these federal lands. Often these diverse needs require specific approval. The Forest Service provides services that support our national policy and federal land laws. The agency's special-uses program authorizes uses on NFS land that provide a benefit to the general public and protect public and natural resources values. Currently there are over 74,000 authorizations on NFS lands representing more than 180 types of uses.

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family or parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (examples include Braille, large print, audiotape, and American Sign Language, among others) should contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) Mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

(2) Fax: (202) 690-7442

(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

For more information about
broadband resources at USDA, visit:

usda.gov/broadband

usda.gov/rdinnovation

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