



Wisconsin

DEVELOPMENTS

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USDA Releases New "Made in Rural America" Report for Wisconsin

New Data Demonstrates Commitment to America's Rural Economy

U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Rural Development State Director for Wisconsin, Stan Gruszynski, recently revealed new data highlighting USDA investments in rural Wisconsin.

"Supporting our rural communities benefits all Wisconsinites," said Gruszynski. "USDA has made dedicated investments in manufacturing, energy and small businesses and is bringing reliable services like water, housing and broadband to help attract and retain a talented workforce. This report shows that the entrepreneurial spirit is strong in rural Wisconsin."

The data summarizes specific USDA investments in rural Wisconsin businesses, manufacturing, energy, water and other infrastructure development. It also outlines how USDA is helping rural Wisconsin attract businesses and families by investing in housing and broadband. This information is part of USDA's national "Made in Rural America" report illustrating the impact of USDA investments in rural America.

In Wisconsin, USDA has made investments to help 386 rural businesses thrive and grow, including \$121.9 million for rural manufacturing. Rural manufacturing supports 128,814 jobs in the state. In addition, USDA has helped 22,940 Wisconsin families purchase or repair homes and has invested \$239.3 million to support efficient water treatment and storage facilities, and wastewater treatment systems. This investment has improved the health of thousands of rural Wisconsinites who now have access to clean water and reliable sanitation.

For example, with the help of a USDA grant the former Elderon Elementary School in



Top: Assembly room at new Dombeck Custom Cabinets Workshop. Bottom: Example of finished product from Dombeck Custom Cabinets.

Elderon, Wis., now serves as the home of Dombeck Custom Cabinets. The company rehabilitated and remodeled the vacant elementary school building in order to expand operations, creating jobs and supporting economic growth in the community of Elderon.

The "Made in Rural America" report reflects USDA's efforts to strengthen the "four pillars" of a new economy in rural America by developing a robust bio-based economy; promoting exports and production agriculture fueled by increased productivity and research; encouraging conservation including land management, stewardship and outdoor recreational opportunities; and building a strong local and regional food system to harness entrepreneurial innovation and help small and medium-sized family farms succeed in rural America.

More information is available at www.rurdev.usda.gov/Reports/Wisconsin_Rural%20Made.pdf.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

USDA Invests \$1.4 Billion to Improve Rural Electric Infrastructure *Funding Includes \$4.8 million to Wisconsin*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced \$1.4 billion in USDA loan guarantees to improve the delivery of electric power to rural communities in 21 states.

“With the help of investments such as these from USDA, rural electric utilities have delivered reliable and affordable electricity for nearly 80 years,” Vilsack said. “Upgrading the electric grid will bring jobs and increased economic opportunities to rural communities.”

The announcement included \$106 million for smart grid technologies and \$3 million for renewable energy programs and systems. The funding will help diversify energy portfolios and decrease our nation’s reliance on carbon-based fuel sources, Vilsack noted.

Smart grid helps rural electric utilities manage power use more effectively. For fiscal year (FY) 2014, USDA’s Rural Utilities Service provided more than \$186 million for smart grid technologies.

USDA has worked with rural electric cooperatives since 1935 to provide electricity for rural consumers. Through the years, these investments have delivered new economic and social opportunities and have enhanced

the quality of life in the nation’s rural communities. The Rural Utilities Service also administers infrastructure programs that bring broadband, safe drinking water and improved wastewater treatment facilities to rural communities.

Among the loan guarantee recipients is Wisconsin’s Clark Electric Cooperative. It is receiving a \$4.8 million loan guarantee to build a new headquarters facility in Greenwood, WI. Clark Electric Cooperative serves six counties in Central and West Central Wisconsin; including Chippewa, Clark, Jackson, Marathon, Taylor, and Wood counties.

View the complete list of recipients and projects receiving funding under the announcement by visiting http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/rdRUSElectricLoanRecipients10_16_2014.pdf.

USDA has invested nearly \$2.5 billion in electric infrastructure improvements in FY 2014 and almost \$31 billion since 2009. In FY 2014 alone, USDA loan guarantees have helped build or improve 19,000 miles of electric transmission and distribution lines.

USDA ANNOUNCES FUNDING TO REPAIR RURAL HOUSING

FUNDING WILL REMOVE HEALTH AND SAFETY HAZARDS, MAKE HOMES MORE ENERGY EFFICIENT

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development State Director, Stan Gruszynski, recently announced that two Wisconsin non-profit organizations have been awarded grant funds to help rural families repair and rehabilitate their homes.

"For some in rural communities, needed home maintenance and repair is simply unaffordable," Gruszynski said. "This program provides supports, in partnership with local non-profit organizations, for essential needs including remediation of housing health and safety hazards for rural families and residents with extremely limited incomes. In addition to preserving housing, this program helps lower housing costs through energy conservation and weatherization improvements."

Community Development Alternatives, Inc. in Prairie du Chien, Wis., and Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. in Independence, Wis. will each receive a \$29,171 grant. Grant funds will enable both organizations to assist five very-low income homeowners make needed repairs to their homes in.

USDA is making the assistance available through the Housing Preservation Grant program. The Department provides financing to intermediaries such as local governments, public agencies, federally recognized Indian Tribes, and non-profit organizations. These recipients distribute the grants to homeowners and owners of multi-family rental properties or cooperative dwellings who rent to low- and very-low-income

residents. Funds are not provided directly to homeowners.

Grants may be used to make general repairs, such as installing or improving plumbing or providing or enhancing access to people with disabilities. Funds may also be used to weatherize and make homes more energy efficient. Many of the USDA grants are being leveraged with funding from additional sources.

Since 2009, USDA has provided more than \$43 million in Housing Preservation Grants that have leveraged almost \$153 million to repair and rehabilitate nearly 11,000 homes and apartments in rural communities across the nation. Wisconsin, alone has received 13 grants, totaling \$773,858, that have assisted nearly 100 rural homeowners across the state.

New Single Family Housing Notices and Program Guidance:

3555 HB Implementation

On December 1, 2014 the 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 3555, “Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program” (SFHGLP) became effective, replacing 7 CFR 1980 Subpart D. The Regulation, Technical Handbook, and respective Forms can be found at the USDA Rural Development's Regulation and Guidance page at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RegulationsAndGuidance.html>. 7 CFR Part 3555 sets forth policies for the SFHGLP. It addresses the requirements of Section 502(h) of the Housing Act of 1949, as amended, and includes policies regarding the origination, servicing, holding and liquidation of SFHGLP loans.

Online training for origination and servicing is available at <https://www.webcaster4.com/Webcast/ListenPage?companyId=694&webcastId=6596>

GRH Lender Loan Closing (LLC)

Beginning December 1, 2014, USDA Rural Development began issuing Loan Note Guarantees (LNG) electronically. To receive the LNG immediately after it is issued, lenders need to sign up for the automated Lender Loan Closing (LLC) system. By signing up for the LLC, lenders will not only be able to easily and efficiently submit loan closing transactions/packages to the Agency for Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loans, they will also:

- Save money through paperless processing—no more overnight delivery fees to submit checks and closing documents to the Agency.
- Electronically submit the information previously collected on Form RD 1980-19, “Loan Closing Report”;
- Electronically submit the upfront Guarantee Fee to the Agency via a Pay.Gov interface (no more paper checks);
- Electronically upload loan closing documentation via a secure environment (e.g. Promissory Note, HUD-1, etc.). Eliminates the need to send via secured email, encrypting documents, etc.);
- Eliminates the paper based Lender Certification;
- Receive a secure link to the LNG immediately after it is issued by the Agency. Lenders can then view, download, print, and/or save the LNG.

By signing up for the LLC and submitting loan closing transactions/packages electronically, not only do lenders save time and costs, but they assist USDA Rural Development save time in processing and issuing the LNG. **Time savings can be up to 50%!**

The LLC will help the agency eliminate the backlog and get back to the point of issuing the LNG within 10 days.

Lenders not yet using the LLC to submit loan closing transactions/packages to the Agency may experience longer LNG processing times.

To get set up and begin submitting electronic loan closings, Lenders must complete a Lender Loan Closing User Agreement to request access to the loan closing transaction system. A fillable version of the Lender Loan Closing User Agreement can be found online at the USDA LINC Training and Resource Library (located in the Lender Loan Closing/Administration section at the following location <https://usdalinc.sc.gov.usda.gov/USDALincTrainingResourceLib.do>)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

USDA Seeks Applicants for Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grants under the Rural Energy for America Program: *Applications are due February 12, 2015*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today invited applications for energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants.

The deadline to apply is February 12. These grants are part of USDA's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), which was created under the 2008 Farm Bill and reauthorized under the 2014 Farm Bill.

Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants are available to units of State, Tribal or local governments and their instrumentalities, institutions of higher education, rural electric cooperatives, public power entities or Resource Conservation and Development Councils.

The Agency will host an informational webinar on Wednesday, January 21, 2015, at 2:00 p.m. eastern time to discuss the Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grant Program. There is no cost for the webinar; however all wishing to participate must register for the event. Please visit, <https://www.webcaster4.com/Webcast/Page/789/7004> to complete the registration for the webcast. The audio only portion of the webinar will be available via phone by dialing Toll-Free (US & Canada) 1-888-669-0685 or International Dial-In (Toll) 1-862-255-5362. Please reference the "USDA Event" when asked which call you are attempting to connect.

Additional information about how to apply for this funding is available in the REAP Funding Notice and about the REAP Final Rule – which makes several important changes to the program based on public comment and the provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill – are available in the [Federal Register](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-29) at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-29> (December 29, 2014, page 78029.)

Future Notices of Funding Availability

past, current, and future notices can be viewed at:

[www.rurdev.usda.gov/ RD_NOFAs](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RD_NOFAs)

Inventory of Housing Stock: Upcoming foreclosure sales are listed below:

COUNTY	ADDRESS	CITY	SALE_DATE	BID_AMOUNT
ONEIDA	21 EAST KEENAN ST	RHINELANDER	1/21/2015	\$4,813.00
CRAWFORD	150 N MICHIGAN ST	PRAIRIE DU CHIEN	1/22/2015	\$56,717.00
SHAWANO	1217 S SMALLEY ST	SHAWANO	2/11/2015	TBD
RACINE	8515 FISHMAN RD	BURLINGTON	2/17/2015	TBD
MONROE	409 W NOTT ST	TOMAH	2/18/2015	TBD
BAYFIELD	10 EAST 5TH ST	WASHBURN	3/17/2015	TBD

For more information, contact Lane Kirsteatter, Housing Specialist, phone: 715.345.7620 Ext. 114 or email at lane.kirsteatter@wi.usda.gov

A Note of Thanks -

Provided by Donna Braun, Executive Director, Dodge County Housing Authority

"I showed the 3 bedroom accessible unit in Horicon at Oak Grove Apartments recently to a mom with a 14 year old, disabled, daughter and a six year old son. Mom was thrilled with the unit and asked me to thank those that participated in the design and construction of the accessible features.

Mom mentioned several specific features below but was really excited with the lower windows. The daughter remarked that with the lower windows at eye level, when she is in the wheelchair she can look outside and see more than the sky. Daughter and Mom travel daily to a YMCA for physical therapy. Mom noted that the daughter will be able to use her motorized chair to use the accessible exercise machine on site, which will aid in her physical therapy. She attends school online, so the internet service is a necessity. The features of the unit offer this 14 year old the independence she needs and the access she deserves.

I send this message as a reminder that the work you do truly makes a difference in the lives of others."

Dodge County Housing Authority (DCHA) is an active partner in preserving affordable housing in Rural Wisconsin. DCHA obtained the funding for the acquisition and rehabilitation of Oak Grove Apartments, a 24 unit family complex. Funding was provided by Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) Tax Credits and the use of the WHEDA's Preservation Revolving Loan Fund (PRLF), funded through USDA Rural Development. The improvements included conversion of unit sizes, geothermal heating, replacement of windows, cabinets, carpeting, appliances, parking areas, walkways, ensuring ADA compliance, and much more.

Agriculture Secretary Announces Funding to Strengthen Rural Businesses and Cooperatives, and Boost Rural Economic Development

In November, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced \$5.8 million in grant awards to 32 recipients to help create jobs and boost economic development activity in rural areas.

"Many rural businesses and organizations are succeeding but with access to additional resources can create more jobs, promote growth and create an environment where more products can be made in rural America," Vilsack said. "The awards we are announcing today will not only provide funding, but they also will provide the critical training and technical assistance rural cooperatives and non-profit groups need to enhance the work they are doing to strengthen America's Main Street businesses."

The funding was provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural

Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program. The RCDG recipients include several who are developing new opportunities for rural farmers and ranchers by capitalizing on the fast-growing market for locally produced food.

For example, Cooperative Network in Wisconsin is receiving a \$200,000 grant to help establish cooperatives focusing on health care, local foods and senior housing. Funds will also be used to help Native American tribal members form a cooperative.

In addition, Cooperative Development Services, Inc. will receive \$200,000 to provide outreach, education, and technical assistance in rural areas of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. Specific tasks include project development assistance, market research, feasibility analysis,

business planning, and governance training.

RCDGs are awarded to non-profit groups and higher education institutions. The recipients use the funds to operate centers to develop or expand rural businesses, especially cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses. The funding can be used to conduct feasibility studies, create and implement business plans, offer technical assistance, establish low-interest loans, and help rural businesses develop new markets for their products and services.

Since fiscal year 2009, USDA has awarded 200 RCDG grants for approximately \$38.4 million that have helped more than 2,500 businesses across rural America.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WI Farmers Union Hosting "Moving Solar Forward" Workshop - January 23, 2015

A pre-convention workshop, "Moving Solar Forward," will kick off the Wisconsin Farmers Union 84th annual State Convention January 23-25, 2015 at The Plaza Hotel in Eau Claire.

The workshop, from noon to 4:15 p.m. on **Friday, January 23**, will feature two tracks, one covering on-farm and household solar installations and another on community and group solar projects in the state.

"We know that building a renewable energy infrastructure in our rural areas is essential for the viability of farming, agriculture and rural communities in the future," said WFU President Darin von Ruden, "so we are bringing together farmers, rural residents and folks working in energy and renewables for an active conversation on plans and strategies."

Track one will consider the steps necessary to assess, design, finance and install a solar system at a farm or residence. Presenters will provide case studies and lead a workshop activity for each participant to work out a task list, timeline and financing opportunities for the project they are considering. Brenda Heinen, USDA Rural Development Rural Energy Specialist will be presenting new information on USDA Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program and application process.

Track two will include a strategic roundtable on a collaborative push for solar in Wisconsin, with specific cases presented, including logistics and financing mechanisms for group solar purchases and community solar projects.

The cost for the workshop is \$15 for WFU members and \$30 for nonmembers, which includes lunch. To register, call the WFU State Office at 715-723-5561 or send a check, payable to Wisconsin Farmers Union, with the printable registration form available at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

WFU calls for farmers to be considered part of the energy solution, rather than the problem, with a focus on establishing clean, independent energy policy. Many WFU members have taken the initiative to install solar energy systems to support their farm operations, but the group recognizes there is much work yet to be done.

(article from WFU Dec.17, 2014 news release)

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



September 30, 2014 - Cadott Wastewater Treatment Facility Open House

USDA Rural Development provided more than \$7.1 million in Water and Waste Disposal Program funding for the construction of a new Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) at a new site in Cadott, Wis. The Village of Cadott's previous WWTF was originally constructed in the 1940s and too small for the current wastewater levels coming in; causing several health, sanitation, and safety issues. The new WWTF is located out of the residential area and allows for continued growth of the community.

October 8, 2014 - Central WI Electric Cooperative Check Presentation to the Village of Alban

Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative officials joined Alban town leaders at their monthly board meeting, to present the Town with a check for \$235,000. Funds are being used for the construction of office and storage space attached to the existing municipal building. In addition, funds will be used to purchase a new plow truck. CWEC provided the funding as a pass thru loan at 0 percent interest for 10 years, through the USDA Rural Development Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program.





October 17, 2014 - Village of Gresham Wastewater Treatment Facility Open House

The Village of Gresham marked the completion of renovations and upgrades to the Village's Wastewater Treatment facility with a community celebration and open house event. USDA Rural Development approved two loans totaling \$371,000, while two grants provided an additional \$295,860 to modify the treatment facility with additional treatment processes to meet the new effluent limit requirements.

October 21, 2014 - Baldwin Area Medical Center Ground Breaking

Baldwin Area Medical Center marked the commencement of construction of a replacement Critical Access Hospital in the Village of Baldwin. The new hospital will have 15 inpatient beds, as well as outpatient facilities, to serve the residents of surrounding areas within St. Croix and Dunn counties. USDA Rural Development provided a total of \$28.5 million through the Community Facilities Program for the construction of a new 100,000 square foot facility on a 95 acre site. Additional funding for the \$43.5 million project include \$7.5 million from a private lender and \$7.5 million from Baldwin Medical Center.



October 21, 2014 - Rhineland Area Food Pantry Grand Opening

Rhineland Area Food Pantry officials celebrated the official opening of the pantry's new, larger facility. The move to the new facility was made possible through community donations and grants RAFP received. Wisconsin Public Service gave a \$10,000 grant for the 5-inch insulation of the new roof. A USDA Rural Development Community Facilities grant paid for more than half - \$26,000 - of the price for equipment such as a forklift and two new floor scales.

November 11, 2014 - Village of Darien Village Hall Grand Opening

United States Congressman Paul Ryan and USDA Rural Development Wisconsin State Director, Stan Gruszynski, joined the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and the Community Development Authority of the Village of Darien; along with village leaders, to celebrate the completion of construction of the Village of Darien's new municipal building. The Community Development Authority of the Village of Darien received a \$1,473,000 Community Facilities Direct Loan from USDA Rural Development and a \$50,000 Community Development Investment Grant from WEDC for the project. The Community Development Investment Grant was a new program launched in 2013, and the Village of Darien was the first community to receive this Grant.



November 13, 2014 - Augusta Area Home Ground Breaking

Augusta Area Home, Inc. is constructing a new 50-bed skilled nursing facility and 12-bed community based residential facility. USDA Rural Development awarded Augusta Area Home, Inc. a \$7.9 million Direct Loan and a \$2,215,000 Loan Guarantee, provided by AgStar Financial, under the Community Facilities Program Area. The funds, leveraged with \$900,000 from the Center's own funds and a \$375,000 Community Development Block Grant from the State of Wisconsin, will complete the \$11.3 million project.

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Midwest Leads USDA's List of Top 100 Ag Co-ops

In recognition of October as National Cooperative Month, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack revealed USDA's annual release of the Nation's Top 100 Cooperatives. Iowa is home to more top 100 agricultural cooperatives than any other state, according to recently released USDA data.

USDA's annual list of the nation's top 100 agricultural cooperatives, by business volume, indicates Iowa is home to more top 100 agricultural cooperatives than any other state, according to recently released USDA data. The number of top 100 co-ops in Iowa, 16, is up from 11 a decade ago. Minnesota ranks second among the states, with 13. It is followed by Nebraska with nine, Illinois and Wisconsin with five each, then California, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri and Ohio, which are all tied with four.

"These statistics underscore what most already know – the Midwest is extremely important to the nation's agricultural economy," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. "Farmer-owned co-ops play a major role in making it an agricultural powerhouse."

Cooperatives in Wisconsin making the nation's top 100 include:

- Foremost Farms USA – Baraboo, WI
- Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP), aka Organic Valley – LaFarge, WI
- United Cooperative – Beaver Dam, WI
- Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association – Baraboo, WI
- Landmark Services Cooperative – Cottage Grove, WI

Looking at business volume where a cooperative has its headquarters, Minnesota ranks first among the states, with \$68.8 billion. Missouri is second at \$16.2 billion and Illinois is third at \$13.2 billion.

Like the nation's ag co-op sector as a whole, the top 100 cooperatives also enjoyed a third consecutive year of record sales. They reported revenue of \$174 billion in 2013, an increase of

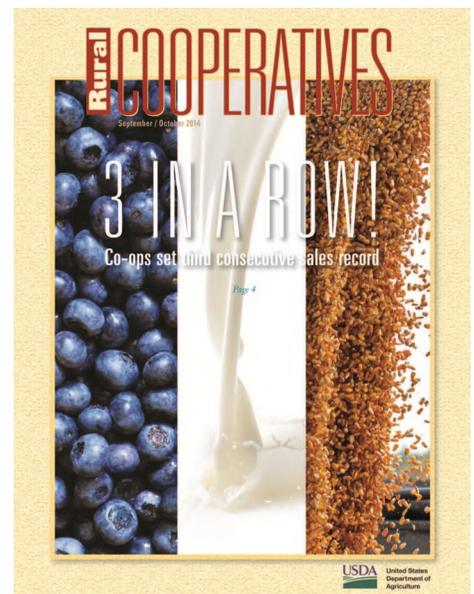
almost 9 percent over the \$166 billion reported in 2012.

Net income (after taxes) remained virtually unchanged from 2012, at \$3.5 billion. The previous records for sales and net income were set in 2012.

Twenty-three cooperatives improved their ranking by double-digits. Six of these are mixed co-ops (co-ops that handle grain and farm supply sales). Dairy and grain each had two co-ops make double-digit gains, while cotton, rice and sugar each had one co-op jump by at least 10 places.

Grain cooperatives have experienced the largest increase in top 100 representation during the past decade. There were 19 grain cooperatives in the top 100 in 2004. That number rose to 41 in 2013. Dairy cooperative representation in the top 100 fell from 28 to 21 during the same period, while farm supply cooperatives increased from 13 to 16.

The Sept.-Oct. issue of USDA's "Rural Cooperatives" magazine includes the top 100 list and an article that examines some of the financial trends it reveals.



ONLINE TOOLS



Notices of Funding Availability



Properties For Sale



Online Forms



Recovery Act Website