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News Release

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USDA Invests \$2.85 Million in Rural Broadband for Tennessee Families

(Halls, TN, Oct. 18, 2019) – Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has invested \$2,856,167 in high-speed broadband infrastructure to create or improve e-Connectivity for 347 rural households in Tennessee. This is the first of many funding announcements in the first round of [USDA's ReConnect Pilot Program](#) investments.

“Our core mission at USDA is to increase rural prosperity through boosting economic opportunity in rural America,” Secretary Perdue said. “We know that rural communities need robust, modern infrastructure to thrive, and that includes having access to broadband e-Connectivity. Under the leadership of President Trump, USDA is proud to partner with rural communities to deploy this critical infrastructure, because we know when rural America thrives, all of America thrives.”

Tennessee's Forked Deer Electric Cooperative will use a ReConnect Program grant to deploy a fiber to the home (FTTH) broadband network capable of simultaneous transmission rates of 100 megabits per second (Mbps) or greater. The funded service areas include 347 households and one critical community facility spread over approximately 435 square miles. The project will facilitate more access to services and information for area residents, and it will improve the overall quality of life for people in these communities.

Background:

In March 2018, Congress provided \$600 million to USDA to expand broadband infrastructure and services in rural America. On Dec. 13, 2018, Secretary Perdue announced the rules of the program, called “[ReConnect](#),” including how the loans and grants will be awarded to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. USDA received 146 applications between May 31, 2019, and July 12, 2019, requesting \$1.4 billion in funding across all three ReConnect Program funding products: 100 percent loan, 100 percent grant, and loan-grant combinations. USDA is reviewing applications and announcing approved projects on a rolling basis. Additional investments in all three categories will be made in the coming weeks.

These grants, loans and combination funds enable the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build modern broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service. Insufficient service is defined as connection speeds of less than 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload.

In April 2017, President Donald J. Trump established the [Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity](#) to identify legislative, regulatory and policy changes that could promote agriculture and prosperity in rural communities. In January 2018, Secretary Perdue presented the Task Force's findings to President Trump. These findings included 31 recommendations to align the federal government with state, local and tribal governments to take advantage of opportunities that exist in rural America. Increasing investments in rural infrastructure is a key recommendation of the task force. To view the report in its entirety, please view the [Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity](#) (PDF, 5.4 MB). In addition, to view the categories of the recommendations, please view the [Rural Prosperity infographic](#) (PDF, 190 KB).

USDA Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities and create jobs in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov/tn.

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