



# News Release

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## **On Earth Day, USDA Invests Nearly \$800 Million in Critical Infrastructure to Combat Climate Change Across Rural America**

### *165 Projects Will Help People in Equity Communities Access Safe Water and Clean Energy*

WASHINGTON, April 22, 2022 – Today, in honor of Earth Day 2022, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing nearly **\$800 million in climate-smart infrastructure** in 40 states, Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands. These investments will strengthen the health and livelihoods of people across rural America. They include funding for 165 projects to expand access to safe water and/or clean energy for people living in equity communities.

Today's announcement is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's Rural Infrastructure Tour, during which Biden Administration officials are traveling to dozens of rural communities to talk about the impact of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments, as well as President Biden's broader commitment to ensure federal resources reach all communities in rural America.

"People in rural America and across the world are experiencing the impacts of climate change in many ways. This includes more severe droughts, more frequent wildfires, and more destructive and life-threatening storms," Vilsack said. "When we invest in infrastructure in rural communities, we are investing in our planet, and we're also investing in the peace of mind families will have when kids are drinking clean and safe tap water in their homes. USDA is proud to celebrate Earth Day and the many ways we are addressing climate change and investing in locally-driven solutions to bring safe water and renewable energy to people in rural areas everywhere."

Today, USDA Rural Development is taking several actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change in rural communities.

### **Advancing Equity in Rural Communities**

USDA Rural Development is [prioritizing projects](#) that advance the Biden-Harris Administration's key priorities of investing in rural communities to ensure people have equitable access to critical resources and to combat the climate crisis. Investments in these communities will make an impact for generations to come.

For example, 165 projects in today's announcement will help advance equity in rural communities, especially in those that have been socially vulnerable, distressed and underserved for far too long.

### **Clean Energy Infrastructure and Energy Efficiency Improvements**

USDA is investing \$787 million in renewable energy infrastructure in 36 states to help agricultural producers, rural small business owners and residents lower energy costs and make energy-efficiency improvements. The Department is making the investments under the [Electric Loan Program](#) and the [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#).

Through REAP, the Department is helping 157 rural businesses and agricultural producers get access to clean energy, while reducing their carbon footprint to make their business operations more cost-effective.

For example, in Errol, New Hampshire, the Errol General Store will use funds for energy-efficient refrigeration equipment, LED lighting and insulation after the store burned down in January '21. The efficiency measures are expected to save the business \$7,500 annually with a 29 percent reduction in energy consumption from the previous operation.

The Electric Program funding includes nearly \$67 million for smart grid technologies that improve system operations and monitor grid security.

For example, in Pennsylvania, REA Energy Cooperative Inc. will use a \$16 million Electric Program loan to connect 635 customers and build and improve 186 miles of line. This loan includes \$6.5 million in smart grid technologies, including 35 miles of overhead fiber.

### **Infrastructure Improvements for Communities Hit by Severe Weather**

USDA is investing \$12 million to help rural communities hit by severe weather. The funds will benefit people living in 17 states, the Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico. The Department is making the investments under the [Community Facilities Disaster Grants](#) program and the [Water and Waste Disposal Disaster Loan and Grant Program](#).

The funds will help communities build back better by mitigating health risks and increasing access to safe, reliable drinking water and sanitary waste disposal services. Funds also will purchase emergency response equipment to help communities be better prepared and more resilient in the face of disaster.

For example, in Puerto Rico, Acueducto Rural Comunidades Especiales Bayamocito Inc. will use a \$30,000 Water and Waste Disposal Disaster Grant to buy a new 20-kilowatt generator with an automatic transfer switch. This grant will help ensure people living in Aguas Buenas, a community hit by Hurricane Maria in 2017, have access to safe and reliable drinking water in the event of any future natural disasters.

The city of Graceville, Minnesota, will use an \$11,000 Community Facilities Disaster Grant to purchase and install an emergency storm siren. The siren will alert community residents of potential severe weather.

USDA is announcing awards through several programs today in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming, Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico.

### **Background: Rural Infrastructure Tour**

Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA and its federal partners in the [Infrastructure Implementation Task Force](#) are working with rural communities to deliver on the promise of support for rural America.

The Rural Infrastructure Tour is a multi-faceted outreach effort involving cabinet and sub-cabinet officials across federal agencies as they travel to and learn from key rural communities. These visits will highlight new federal funding and investments already underway through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, a once-in-a-generation investment that will support rural communities and their infrastructure needs.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean-energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans 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, tribal and high-poverty areas. For more information, visit [www.rd.usda.gov](http://www.rd.usda.gov).

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