



July 17, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman, Senate Committee on Agriculture
328(A) Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture
328(A) Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: ReConnecting Rural America Act

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Scott:

We write to you today in support of the “ReConnecting Rural America Act,” which was introduced by Senators Welch and Marshall in the Senate and Representatives Nunn, Craig, LaHood, and Sorensen and others in the House. This legislation would make USDA’s ReConnect Loan and Grant Program permanent, ensure networks built leveraging program funds deliver at least 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds, and prioritize awards to areas in which at least 90 percent of households lack 100/20 Mbps. Given our shared interest in ensuring the long-term success and well-being of rural America, it is our hope that you would consider this legislation as you continue negotiations on the 2023 Farm Bill. This is a time when public policy plays an important role in helping to build and sustain broadband in rural markets that would not otherwise justify such investments and ongoing operations.

The stakeholders below represent a broad cross-section of entities with a vested interest in the vitality and long-term viability of rural America. From producing food to sustain the nation to providing critical connectivity and energy for rural communities, and from educating rural students to caring for the medical needs of rural residents, the organizations below and members of them play a critical role in powering the American economy and ensuring that rural areas thrive.

Broadband programs within the Farm Bill present an opportunity to aim for levels of connectivity that will meet the needs of rural Americans not just today but well into the future. Sound and fiscally responsible policy dictates investing in infrastructure that is built to last and, as representatives of rural communities, we believe it is essential that rural residents, businesses, and anchor institutions have access to the same robust and affordable connectivity enjoyed by urban dwellers.

While broadband has value universally, it is especially important for rural Americans who often must rely even more than their urban counterparts on online access given the challenges of distance and density. From telehealth, remote work, distance learning, and precision agriculture, the opportunities for rural Americans are substantial when given the ability to access high-speed, reliable internet services.

With billions of dollars and millions of unserved Americans at stake, it is prudent and responsible for the federal government to invest taxpayer resources based upon more than speculation as to potential performance, marketing hype, and claims of capability not borne out of real-world applications throughout rural America. The minimum speed and other performance criteria for receiving federal funding must be determined by the needs of rural consumers and not set by the maximum capabilities some in the industry feel they can offer. We therefore encourage you to prioritize symmetrical speeds and scalable networks in Farm Bill broadband programs, recognizing the lasting impacts that robust broadband can have on rural economic growth, development, and quality of life.

We thank you for your time and look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

NTCA- The Rural Broadband Association
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Cooperative Business Association
USA Rice
Power and Communication Contractors Association
National Rural Economic Developers Association
National Rural Education Association
Fiber Broadband Association
Utilities Technology Council
National Pork Producers Council
National Turkey Federation
Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative
National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Rural Community College Alliance
Farm Credit Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Sorghum Producers
Land O'Lakes, Inc.
National Milk Producers Federation
U.S. Peanut Federation
National Association of Home Builders
The Fertilizer Institute
National Corn Growers Association
American Soybean Association