



Farm Bill Priorities

Identifying Eligible Areas

Close coordination among federal and state agencies will be essential to avoid deploying duplicative government-funded broadband networks in a rural area that will not even support one provider on its own. The Farm Bill should specify the ways in which ReConnect funds may interact with funds already awarded under other programs; specifically, ReConnect funds should not be awarded to any provider in an area where a different provider is the recipient of: (a) a Rural Utilities Service ("RUS") telecom program loan or grant; (b) support from federal universal service programs; and/or (c) a state broadband grant program.

Meeting the Needs of Consumers

Federal broadband investments should support technology that can be readily upgraded to deliver the fastest speeds over the long-term life of the asset being built, rather than supporting technologies that may appear cheaper to deploy now but will be unable to provide meaningful internet access over time that keeps pace with consumer demand without the need to be substantially rebuilt. The Farm Bill should support high-speed symmetrical broadband networks that offer 100/100 Mbps.

Project Delays After Notice of Awards

The Farm Bill should address historical preservation requirements and environmental reviews that often result in significant delays between notice of awards and receipt of the funds necessary to commence construction. While RUS can take certain steps on its own to mitigate such delays to some degree by, among other things, allowing providers to work toward seeking approval of environmental and historical reviews prior to an award, Congress should consider other means of streamlining network deployment while still providing reasonable protections for important historical and environmental concerns that may apply in certain contexts.

No Provider Preference Based Upon Corporate Structure

The Farm Bill should codify that providers seeking grants or other funding will not be favored based on the form of organization or commercial status. Providers should be allowed to apply to programs on a level playing field.

Cosponsor the ReConnecting Rural America Act (S.3084/H.R.3119)

The bill would make USDA's ReConnect Loan and Grant Program permanent, ensure networks continue to be built at 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds, and prioritize awards to areas in which at least 90 percent of households lack 100/20 Mbps.