

USDA Invests \$22.5 Million in High-Speed Broadband for Rural Michigan

Funding will Bring e-Connectivity to Nearly 20,000 Rural Residents

WASHINGTON, May 13, 2020 — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced during a virtual press conference that USDA is investing \$22.5 million for two recipients in Michigan to provide broadband service in unserved and underserved rural areas. These investments are part of USDA's round one investments made through the **ReConnect Pilot Program**.

"The need for rural broadband has never been more apparent than it is now — as our nation manages the coronavirus national emergency. Access to telehealth services, remote learning for school children, and remote business operations all require access to broadband," said Secretary Perdue. "I am so proud of our rural communities who have been working day in and day out, just like they always do, producing the food and fiber America depends on. We need them more than ever during these trying times, and expanding access to this critical infrastructure will help ensure rural America prospers for years to come."

The awards include an \$11.8 million loan/grant combination to Barry County Services Company to provide affordable, fiber-based broadband services in rural Barry County. This project will extend broadband availability to 17 farms, 16 businesses and 12,000 residents spread over 127 square miles.

Southwest Michigan Communications Inc. is receiving a \$10.7 million loan/grant combination to deploy Fiber-to-the-Premises (FTTP) broadband service to Van Buren and Allegan counties. This project will extend broadband availability to 22 farms, 19 businesses and 7,700 residents spread over 100 square miles. The two projects will bring modern broadband service to nearly 20,000 residents.

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.

On April 20, 2020, USDA announce the Department has received 172 applications for \$1.57 billion in round two of the ReConnect Program. The second round will enable USDA to implement innovative solutions to rural connectivity by leveraging financial options with our partners and build on the success of the first round of funding. The application window for round two closed April 15.

USDA received 11 round two ReConnect Program applications that are eligible for the \$100 million Congress allocated to the program through the CARES Act.

To learn more about ReConnect Program eligibility, technical assistance and recent announcements, visit www.usda.gov/reconnect.

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.

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.