

The programs of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) touch the lives of tens of millions of rural Americans daily. Through project financing and technical assistance, RUS builds infrastructure to provide rural businesses and households with modern telecommunications, electric energy, and water. Today, this also means bringing the "information superhighway" to rural America.

A new initiative, Water 2000, is an ambitious undertaking by RUS to extend safe, dependable drinking water to the 1.4 million rural Americans who currently lack this service, and to the 2.4 million people who consistently experience water-related health problems, dry or shallow drinking wells, or frequent orders to boil their drinking water. In the last 2 years, RUS has invested \$300 million in loans and grants to the Nation's highest priority Water 2000 projects.

RUS is more than a new name for the successful programs of predecessor agencies. It is a partner with rural business and economic development efforts, providing infrastructure that is the foundation for competitiveness. It is a technical and financial resource in a time of change for rural utilities.

**Rural Telecommunications Loans and Loan Guarantees** build modern rural communications systems. They provide rural areas with "ramps" to the information superhighway by making financing available for telecommunications facilities. Loans are made to rural telephone cooperatives and companies which bring reliable and affordable telecommunications services to more than 15 million rural Americans.

**Rural Electric Loans and Loan Guarantees** provide reliable, safe, and affordable electric energy to rural America by financing power distribution, generation, and transmission systems. Loans are made to nonprofit and cooperative associations, public bodies, and other utilities which serve more than 25 million rural Americans.

**Distance Learning and Medical Link Loans and Grants** bring distance learning and telemedicine to rural America. Education and adequate medical care are crucial to the survival of rural communities, but are becoming increasingly difficult to provide. This program employs innovative ways to use existing telecommunications infrastructure to extend the reach of educational and medical expertise into communities without that expertise. The new loan program, authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill, is being developed to further expand rural telecommunications infrastructure.

**Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grants** develop water and waste disposal systems (including solid waste disposal and storm drainage) in rural areas and towns with populations under 10,000. The funds are available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, special purpose districts, Indian Tribes, and non-profit corporations. RUS also guarantees water and waste disposal loans made by banks and other eligible lenders.

**Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants** help rural communities that have experienced a significant decline in drinking water quantity or quality to make emergency repairs and replace existing facilities. Grants can be made in rural areas and towns with a population of 10,000 or less and a median household income of no more than 100 percent of the State's median nonmetropolitan household income.