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Rural Infrastructure Tour Fact Sheet:

President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Empowers the Department of Agriculture to Deliver for Rural America

President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will deliver billions to rural communities across the country to create economic opportunity. Supporting Americans living in rural areas remains a top priority for the Biden Administration, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law delivers on the President's promises to provide high-speed internet, safe roads and bridges, modern wastewater systems, clean drinking water, reliable and affordable electricity, and good-paying jobs in every small town and rural community. As part of this effort, the Biden Administration is also committed to working with communities to help them access federal resources and improving transparency and trust in the federal government.

The Department of Agriculture will lead this effort focusing on broadband and climate resilience. This fact sheet provides information for rural communities to know all the available resources under the infrastructure law, where to apply, or how find more information.

Please route any questions to: EIA@usda.gov.

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The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring that rural Americans have the opportunity to succeed – and that they can find that opportunity in rural America. President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) is a transformative, historic investment and opportunity to improve life and livelihoods across America – from delivering 21st century broadband to farmers, ranchers, small businesses and rural communities for access to markets, jobs, telemedicine and distance learning to increasing community resiliency to climate change, drought and wildfire risks to providing innovative solutions that will strengthen American farmers, ranchers, foresters, producers, and rural communities.

Through investments in infrastructure, including BIL, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding economic opportunities, creating jobs, and improving the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas. These crucial investments are helping families and rural communities thrive, enabling American farmers and producers to feed, clothe and fuel our nation, improving our natural resources, farmlands, and the environment, protecting the safety of our food supply, preparing tomorrow's workforce and future leaders, and so much more.

Closing the Digital Divide and Connecting Communities

Through a historic investment in broadband infrastructure deployment, we will close the divide in rural America. This is a big deal for farmers to have access to real-time information and new technologies needed to maintain their competitive edge, for small businesses to be able to develop their markets, and for rural communities to become better connected to jobs, telemedicine, and distance learning.

- **ReConnect Program - \$2 billion.** The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides USDA with a [\\$2 billion investment](#) through the ReConnect Program to provide loans and grants toward construction costs, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service in eligible rural areas. This funding comes on top of the [\\$1.15 billion in broadband loans](#), grants and loan/grant combinations through ReConnect that USDA announced earlier this year.
- **Rural Broadband Investments.** Moreover, USDA has significantly expanded investments in rural broadband during the Biden-Harris administration's first 12 months. The Department invested [\\$336 million to finance broadband infrastructure](#) in unserved and underserved rural areas during Fiscal Year 2021.
- **Broadband Data.** Broadband for Precision Agriculture: Agricultural Research Service (ARS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and Esri, an international supplier of geographic information systems software, are working to map county-level production data for U.S. commodity and specialty crops, with FCC broadband access data. This will help determine where federal funding is needed to expand rural broadband access that will directly benefit precision agriculture.

Increasing Rural Resilience

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests approximately \$5.5 billion in lands and resources entrusted to the Forest Service, including many of the landscapes and watersheds we manage together with our federal, tribal, state, private and other partners. The new funding will let us build new and increased capacity for working with partners to improve wildland fire management and repair infrastructure, both nature-based and constructed, across the national forests and grasslands.

- **Reducing Wildfire Risk and Restoring Landscapes - \$3 billion.** Of the \$5.5 billion, about \$3 billion will be invested over five years to reduce the risk of wildland fire and restore ecosystems. These investments will support our [10-year strategy](#) for reducing wildfire risk by treating the right landscapes at the scale needed to sustain and restore healthy, resilient fire-adapted forests. More information about individual programs is available on the Forest Service's [website](#).
- **Firefighter Pay:** The bill also invests in our workforce by increasing base pay and creating a new occupational pay scale for wildland firefighters, sorely needed in this era of growing fire severity and extreme fire behavior. More information is available on the Forest Service's [website](#).
- **Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program - \$1 billion.** The Forest Service is working with the National Association of State Foresters, Intertribal Timber Council, and other partners to implement the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) Program authorized by the President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and funded with \$1 billion to be spent over a five-year period of FY22 – FY26. Private forest owners, communities at risk from wildfire, Tribal communities, and state forestry agencies are eligible to apply.
- **State Forest Action Plan Implementation - \$200 million.** This program awards funding to states and territories to implement their State Forest Action Plans. FY22 funds will be awarded via program formula to existing partnerships with State Forestry Agencies for Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Stewardship and Forest Health.

BIL also includes help for farmers and ranchers grappling with drought, to improve watersheds and water supply in the West, and bolster our efforts to repair waterways and watersheds and rehabilitate aging dams to protect communities from flooding.

- **Watershed Infrastructure:** The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided \$918 million to invest in both new dam and flood prevention projects as well as repairs on existing watershed infrastructure. This includes dams, water storage structures, flood management systems, bank stabilization projects, and other efforts. In FY2022, NRCS made \$21 million available from the standard EQIP authorization to establish the [WaterSMART Initiative](#) in collaboration with U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate investments that modernize existing infrastructure and help these organizations improve their drought resilience. Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, NRCS is also investing [more than \\$166.5 million](#) in new dam, flood prevention, and drought resilience infrastructure through multiple NRCS programs.

Additional non-BIL funding streams that promote environmental resilience include:

- **Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCF).** [This program](#) is dedicated to the stewardship of the nation's urban forests, supporting

maintenance, restoration, and improvement of urban forest health while creating jobs, enhancing community resilience, and preserving the unique sense of place in cities and towns of all sizes. UCF is a federal community assistance program, primarily working with state forestry agencies to provide technical, financial, research, and educational support and services to local governments, nonprofit and community organizations, educational institutions, and Tribal governments. Funding has been appropriated at \$36 million in FY2022.

- **Recreation Economy for Rural Communities.** [This program](#) provides planning assistance program is a technical assistance program that helps communities identify strategies that can foster environmentally friendly community development and Main Street revitalization through conservation and sustainable use of public or private forests or other natural resources.
- **Wood Innovations and Community Wood Grants.** The [Wood Innovations Program](#) expands and creates markets for wood products and wood energy that support long-term, sustainable management of National Forest System lands and other forest lands. The program has two national competitive grants programs, as well as project activities funded under discretionary agreements and annual work plans. The Wood Innovations Grants program emphasizes market for wood products and wood energy projects. The Community Wood Grants program provides funding for to support installation of thermally led wood energy systems or to build innovative wood products manufacturing facilities.
- **NFWF Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program.** [This program](#) seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to diverse local partnerships for wetland, forest, riparian and coastal habitat restoration, stormwater management, outreach and stewardship with a particular focus on water quality, watersheds and the habitats they support. Funded through public, private partnerships, the program will award approximately \$2.6 million in grants in 2022.

Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program. [This program](#) is a competitive grant program that provides financial assistance to tribal entities, local governments, and qualified conservation non-profit organizations to acquire and establish community forests that provide community benefits such as economic benefits through active forest management, clean water, wildlife habitat, educational opportunities, and public access for recreation. Funding has been appropriated at \$5.5 million in FY2022.

Rural Community Economic Development

Through programs across government, BIL funds programs that will spur community economic development. At USDA, this includes millions of dollars of funding to the Secure Rural Schools program.

- **Secure Rural Schools - \$585 million.** BIL includes \$585 million for a three-year extension of the existing Secure Rural Schools program, which provides funding through the Forest Service for schools, roads, and public services in more than 700 counties. Payments are made to states and counties. More information about the program is available on the Forest Service's [website](#).

In addition, several USDA programs funded from outside of BIL support rural economic development.

- **Rural Business-Cooperative Service.** USDA's locally-based [Business-Cooperative Programs](#) teams expertly partner with individuals, communities, and the private sector to boost economic development through job creation and workforce training, placing renewed emphasis on work that protects and sustains our environment.
- **Rural Utilities Service.** USDA's [Rural Utilities Service](#), provides funding and technical assistance that strengthens foundational infrastructure like electricity, and water and wastewater treatment. We also champion rural broadband: modern infrastructure that helps level the playing field for rural-based families, schools, health care providers, businesses, and manufacturers.
- **Rural Housing Service.** USDA's [Rural Housing Service](#) helps Americans buy, build, and rent homes and apartments found outside the country's urban centers. This dedicated focus on our rural communities reverberates throughout the entire nation, because we know when rural people thrive, all of America thrives.

In 2022, USDA Rural Development has already announced a number of infrastructure investments to support rural communities, including:

- **Support for Local Businesses.** \$1.4 billion through eight Rural Development programs to support local businesses, create good-paying jobs and strengthen the economy in rural America through job training, business expansion and technical assistance. The programs these investments are being made through are part of a suite of business and cooperative services that are projected to help create or [save more than 50,000 jobs](#) in rural America through investments made in fiscal year 2021.
- **Community Facilities.** \$1 billion to increase access to health care, education, and public safety while spurring community development and building sound infrastructure for people living in rural communities. Through 731 projects in five USDA programs, these loans and grants will help rural communities invest in facilities and services.

- **Food and Processing Infrastructure.** USDA will [provide \\$375 million](#) in gap financing grants for independent processing plants projects to expand facilities and for construction of new facilities. USDA is also currently making [\\$150 million](#) of this available under the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program for grants of up to \$25 million each to expand processing capacity through a variety of activities, such as construction, expansion of existing facilities, and equipment. Finally, The Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program will [provide approximately \\$1 billion](#) in loan guarantees to commercial lenders and will facilitate financing to qualified borrowers to expand financing for food systems infrastructure , particularly for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storage, transportation, wholesaling, or distribution of food.
- **Cooperative Extension and Research.** USDA-funded [Cooperative Extension and research](#) plays a key role in rural community economic development. Through Smith-Lever capacity funding, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provides comprehensive local support for farmers, families and communities through the network of close to 14,000 Cooperative Extension agents and education across the 3,000 U.S. counties and county equivalents. Extension education delivery is informed by geographically-specific research from more than 600 NIFA-supported agricultural experiment stations' 13,000 scientists who are supported with Hatch Act funding.
- **Regional Rural Development Centers.** The USDA-NIFA funded [Regional Rural Development Centers](#) (RRDCs) play a unique role in USDA's service to rural America. They link the research and educational outreach capacity of the nation's public universities with communities, local decision makers, entrepreneurs, families, and farmers and ranchers to help address a wide range of development issues. They collaborate on national issues that span regions — like e-commerce, the changing interface between rural, suburban, and urban places, and workforce quality and job creation. Each group tailors its programs to address specific needs in its region.
- **Climate Hubs.** The 10 USDA Climate Hubs support rural communities and economies and focus on production agriculture, grazing systems, and forest lands. This regional outreach provides a focal point for disseminating USDA research and support to help producers address challenges such as wildfires, invasive pests, devastating floods, and crippling droughts by translating science and research into usable information to build landscape-level resilience. Climate Hubs build on the research and development expertise within USDA research agencies to provide streamlined and coordinated service delivery from multiple programs to ensure working land managers and other stakeholders have the resources they need to operate in a changing climate. The [Climate Hubs](#) also provide a direct connection to other partner service providers, including NOAA and USGS, and regional stakeholders (e.g., non-government organizations, universities, and state extension offices) to communicate research needs back to scientific agencies.

As part of these efforts, USDA is advancing equity by ensuring investments and services are going to those who need them most. USDA investments in rural and tribal communities are inherently aligned with this priority and even more so when those investments are in persistently poor, socially vulnerable, or high-need places. Investments and opportunities include:

- **Funding for Underserved Communities.** In 2021, USDA's Rural Development awarded more than [\\$2 billion in loans](#), grants, and loan guarantees for historically underserved groups and rural communities that have experienced persistent generational poverty. Many of these investments improved the infrastructure of rural communities, including:
 - \$1.3 billion for electric infrastructure in communities of persistent poverty
 - \$25 million to improve water and waste disposal systems in Native American communities
 - \$9 million to improve community facilities and access to essential services for people living in Appalachian communities.
 - \$86 million in loans and grants through 218 projects to help support rural businesses and to invest in equity-building projects in rural communities.
- **Technical Assistance.** In November 2021, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced USDA will provide approximately \$75 million in American Rescue Plan funding to 20 organizations to provide technical assistance to connect underserved producers with USDA programs and services. Organizations were selected for their proven track records working with underserved producer communities, such as veterans, beginning farmers, limited resource producers, and producers living in high-poverty areas. These organizations will work with underserved producer communities on business and tax planning, financial assistance planning, market planning, farmer advocacy, and business curriculum development. Building on this investment, in March 2022, NIFA announced another [\\$25 million](#) in technical assistance to be given through a competitive process.

Clean Energy Investments

BIL makes historic investments in clean energy across the country. Several of USDA's existing infrastructure programs support these efforts to promote clean energy, create new jobs, and open new markets for agricultural production, energy conservation and rural production.

- **Bioproduct Pilot Program - \$10 million.** The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has made available \$10M (\$5M FY22, \$5M FY23) for the establishment of a new Bioproduct Pilot Program in USDA's [Research, Education, and Economics](#) mission area to support the scale-up of sustainable bioproduct manufacturing. The program will support scale-up activities and studies on the benefits of biobased products including lower carbon footprints, lower solid waste requirements, and – importantly – lower costs than materials on the market today.

In addition, USDA has several long-standing programs geared at bolstering clean energy in rural America.

- **Bioethanol, Biodiesel, and Rural Energy.** USDA Rural Development announced \$100 million in new investments to increase significantly the sales and use of higher blends of bioethanol and biodiesel through expansion of the infrastructure for renewable fuels derived from U.S. agricultural products. USDA also made the following investments in locally-driven solutions that build resiliency in rural communities and address climate change:
 - Investing \$687 million through the Rural Energy for America Program to help rural businesses purchase and install energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy systems like solar.
 - Investing more than \$47 million in grants across 31 states to add almost a billion gallons of higher blends fuels to the market through the Higher Blends Infrastructure Investment Program.
 - Investing \$241 million in renewable and energy storage loans through the Rural Utilities Service. These investments include 13 solar projects totaling \$199.8 million, one \$4 million hydroelectric project and one \$38 million battery energy storage system.