



Jim Matheson
Chief Executive Officer

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The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture
RM 109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
Room 731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

Expanding access to high-speed internet service should be one of the most important elements of the Senate Farm Bill. Unfortunately, there are policy proposals being disseminated that are designed to simply protect the status quo and will leave parts of rural America with second class broadband service for decades to come. Specifically, we strongly oppose restrictive language that would prevent the construction of a modern, high-speed broadband system in any area that has received support from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Universal Service Fund, even if the current service available there is substandard.

A new approach to broadband deployment is needed to ensure that rural America does not continue to be relegated to "good enough for rural" service standards. Some of these systems were designed to provide speeds of only 10/1 Mbps, 4/1 or less, and that's when they're operating at full capacity. We don't believe that's fast enough to sustain a household, much less attract and run a modern business.

The people we serve in rural America recognize that without access to modern, high-speed broadband on par with their urban counterparts, rural competitiveness, productivity and quality of life will suffer. In some cases, electric cooperatives are stepping up to deliver that needed residential service. But, regardless of who provides it, we believe that rural areas should have equal access to quality broadband. It's not a luxury. It's a 21st Century necessity.

We urge the Senate Committee on Agriculture to include incentives that aggressively promote broadband in rural America. NRECA recommends the creation of a new grant-loan combination program at USDA that would target funds toward the most rural and hard to serve parts of the country and reward forward-looking quality standards. This approach is technology neutral, and would allow any capable provider to participate.

Most of our food is grown, much of our power is generated, and many of our goods are still manufactured in rural America. That's why we all have a stake in rural competitiveness, productivity, and quality of life. America's electric cooperatives strongly oppose policy that would weaken efforts to deliver broadband or lock-in second-class internet service for those areas. We urge you to do the same.

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 CC Senate Ag Committee membership