



June 18, 2026

## Farm Bill Primer: Rural Broadband Provisions

Since 2002, Congress has included provisions addressing rural broadband (i.e., high-speed internet access) in the rural development title of farm bills. The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 farm bill; P.L. 115-334) amended, reauthorized, and codified many of the rural broadband programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through FY2023. The 2018 farm bill also provided authorizations of appropriations for many of the USDA broadband programs. Congress enacted three one-year extensions of the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102; P.L. 118-158, Division D, §4101; P.L. 119-37, Division E, §5002). Authorizations for many of the USDA broadband programs are set to expire on September 30, 2026.

The House-passed Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 (H.R. 7567) would amend and reauthorize some of the broadband programs in the 2018 farm bill and create new broadband programs. As of June 15, 2026, a farm bill has not been introduced in the Senate during the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### Background

According to June 2025 data from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), about 16% of people living in rural areas in the United States lack broadband access at the benchmarked speeds of at least 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload (i.e., 100/20 Mbps). The USDA Rural Utilities Service administers four programs to support broadband deployment in rural areas.

1. The [Community Connect Grant Program](#) provides grants to deploy broadband to economically distressed communities and their essential community facilities (7 U.S.C. §950bb-3).
2. The [Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program](#) provides grants to help rural communities acquire the technology and training to connect educational and medical professionals with students, teachers, and patients in rural areas (7 U.S.C. §950aaa-2).
3. The [ReConnect Program](#) provides grants, loans, and loan-grant combinations to build and update facilities or equipment needed to provide broadband access to rural areas. The program requires broadband service to be provided through [fixed terrestrial technologies](#). Fiber-optical cable (“fiber”) is the most common fixed terrestrial technology able to provide broadband service at the

required program speeds. As of June 2026, the ReConnect Program is a pilot program without specific statutory authority. Congress provided USDA general statutory authority to create the pilot program through the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. §§901 et seq.).

4. The [Rural Broadband Program](#) provides loans, loan-grant combinations, and loan guarantees to construct or improve facilities and equipment used to provide broadband access to rural areas (7 U.S.C. §950bb).

### 2018 Farm Bill Provisions

The rural development title of the 2018 farm bill and its extensions authorized appropriations for rural broadband programs and included program-specific provisions, which are discussed below.

#### Community Connect Grant Program

Congress codified the Community Connect Grant Program to provide grants to eligible entities for broadband transmission projects in rural areas.

#### Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program

Congress required USDA to set aside at least 20% of the funding for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program for telemedicine projects providing substance abuse treatment services through FY2026.

#### Rural Broadband Program

Congress added a grant component to the Rural Broadband Program in addition to loans and loan guarantees. Prior to the 2018 farm bill, Congress had provided funding for loans and loan guarantees but not for grants. Congress directed USDA to prioritize funding to project applications that would serve rural communities without broadband service. Rural communities without broadband service for this program are communities without residential broadband service of at least 10 megabits per second download and 1 megabit per second upload (10/1 Mbps). Congress also required USDA to prioritize funding to project applications that would provide broadband service to rural communities that have populations of less than 10,000 permanent residents, are experiencing outmigration, or are isolated from other population centers.

#### Other Rural Broadband Provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill

- **Verify applicant eligibility.** Congress directed USDA to consult with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to verify applicant

eligibility for USDA broadband programs, using the broadband assessment and mapping data provided by NTIA (7 U.S.C. §950bb-6(a)). Congress also directed USDA to ensure that no duplication exists across broadband programs administered by USDA, FCC, and NTIA (7 U.S.C. §950bb-6(b)).

- **Public database.** Congress directed the Secretary of Agriculture to make available to the public a searchable database on the Rural Utilities Service website. This database would include information on applications submitted to USDA broadband programs that would provide broadband to end users, such as homes and businesses (7 U.S.C. §950cc). The database is also to identify the applicants that received funding. USDA Rural Development established a [public searchable map database](#), which includes approved projects and those under review for all USDA broadband programs.
- **Innovative Broadband Advancement Program.** Congress reauthorized the Rural Gigabit Network Pilot and renamed it the Innovative Broadband Advancement Program. The program is authorized to provide loans and grants for projects that demonstrate innovative broadband technologies that decrease costs and increase broadband service speeds in rural areas (7 U.S.C. §950bb-2). Congress provided authorization of appropriations but, to date, has not funded this program.
- **Middle mile infrastructure.** Congress established a new program to provide grants, loans, and loan guarantees for middle mile broadband infrastructure projects in rural areas (7 U.S.C. §950bb-1). Congress defined *middle mile infrastructure* as “any broadband infrastructure that does not connect directly to end-user locations (including anchor institutions) and may include interoffice transport, backhaul, internet connectivity, data centers, or special access transport to rural areas” (7 U.S.C. §950bb-1(b)). Congress provided authorization of appropriations but, to date, has not funded this program.

## Discussion of Selected Broadband Program Provisions in H.R. 7567

### ReConnect Rural Broadband Program

H.R. 7567 would amend the authority for the Rural Broadband Program, terminate the ReConnect Program, and transfer the unobligated funds into the proposed ReConnect Rural Broadband Program. Under the proposed program, USDA would be authorized to issue grants, loans, loan-grant combinations, and loan guarantees. Among other proposed changes, the bill would set the broadband buildout speed requirements to be based on the project award term. Projects of longer terms require higher speeds, ranging from 100/50 Mbps to 500/250 Mbps. Any technology that can provide broadband service at the buildout speed would be eligible.

The proposed program would allow for a range of technologies to deliver broadband service. For example, in some remote or rural areas, [low Earth orbit \(LEO\) satellite](#) technologies can provide broadband service where other

technologies, such as fiber or cable, may not be feasible due to cost or geographical limitations. In addition, some of these technologies may have lower deployment costs than fiber in certain cases. For instance, [cost to connect](#) in Maine was cited at \$600 per location using LEO satellites, while cost to connect in Nevada was cited at \$10,370 per location using fiber. Not all technologies provide equal reliability. For example, weather conditions or heavily forested terrain may cause interruptions in LEO service due to the requirement that the satellite be in view of both the customer’s and the provider’s ground stations. Another potential consideration is the limited competition in broadband service provided by LEO satellites: Customers may be dependent on a small number of businesses and their respective business decisions (e.g., to raise prices or make changes to service).

### Community Connect Grant Program

H.R. 7567 would amend the eligible service areas for the Community Connect Grant Program to areas where households do not have broadband service at speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps (an increase from the current speed of 10/1 Mbps). The buildout speed for the program would match what would be set for the proposed ReConnect Rural Broadband Program (i.e., speed requirements would be based on the project award term).

These proposed changes may result in broader eligibility for rural communities to be provided with service at higher speeds. It also establishes consistent buildout speed requirements across USDA programs. Should more areas be eligible, the competition for this funding may increase.

### Broadband Technical Assistance Program

H.R. 7567 would establish the Broadband Technical Assistance Program, which would make grants to eligible entities for the purpose of delivering technical assistance and training to rural communities to improve access to USDA broadband programs. The bill would also authorize USDA to make grants to eligible entities for the purpose of collecting broadband service data. It would require USDA to use these data in a variety of ways, including to establish the availability of broadband in rural areas, determine eligible service areas for USDA broadband programs, and collect data to submit a challenge (i.e., submit a proposed correction) to the FCC [National Broadband Map](#).

The proposed technical assistance program may help more applicants secure funding for rural broadband deployment. It would also collect data that may improve the accuracy of broadband access statistics in rural areas and may ultimately further increase the accuracy of the FCC National Broadband Map. Implementation of such a program may require additional appropriations to establish a new grant program. If Congress does not wish to provide additional appropriations, it may redirect funding from existing USDA broadband programs that build out broadband infrastructure. This may potentially reduce the expansion of broadband service in rural areas.

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