

# Frank Frassetto: When rural america thrives, Wisconsin thrives

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Despite the challenges we faced, 2020 was a record-breaking year for USDA Rural Development and therefore it has been a monumental year for the communities we serve.

We know when rural communities do well, America does well. Rural America provides us with the food we eat, the water we drink and the energy we use. That's why it's good news that in all corners of rural Wisconsin, we're seeing real, positive change as our communities continue to build prosperity and strengthen rural business and infrastructure.

Because of the partnerships we have cultivated, current estimates show that we have invested over \$618 million through our loan and grant programs into rural businesses and economic development, essential community facilities, critical infrastructure including high-speed broadband and housing in rural Wisconsin.

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Thanks to those investments:

More than 2,400 families now have a place to call home or made repairs to their houses. Our Guaranteed Rural Housing Program had a banner year by providing over \$23 billion nationwide through our valued lending partners.

More than 5,000 families received rental assistance to make their rental payments more affordable. Trolley Station Terrace Apartments in Marinette is constructing a 45-unit three story building fitted with roof top terrace by utilizing \$6.3 million in

Low Income Housing Tax Credits through WHEDA and \$1.8 million through our Multi-Family Housing Guarantee Program.

More than 530,000 rural subscribers, patients and students enjoy access to new or improved telecommunications and broadband service. We worked to bring high-speed internet capacity by partnering with Ntera LLC to bring \$3 million in ReConnect grant funding to connect over 2,000 residents, 33 farms and 33 businesses in Rusk, Chippewa & Taylor Counties.

Five companies received funding to expand the sale and use of renewable fuels through our new Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program which will in turn support our agricultural producers.

More than 95,000 rural residents are enjoying improved essential community facilities and equipment from squad cars to fire stations, from clinics to hospitals and more. Lakeland University students are going to enjoy their new modern dormitories funded in partnership with Bank First and our Community Facility Program to the tune of \$36 million.

Nearly 25,000 rural residents received safe water or improved water systems through our Water and Environmental Programs. Many communities that suffered flooding damage are using this program to repair or upgrade their water and wastewater infrastructure.

Nearly 90 businesses received loans or grants through our Business Programs to save over 700 jobs and create almost 190 jobs. Eight of these businesses were assisted through new CARES Act funding which provided working capital to prevent, prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, USDA continues to make great strides in building prosperity in rural Wisconsin because when rural America thrives, all of America thrives. We want to extend our thanks to all the agencies, partners and economic development leaders we worked with last year which ensured that our investments in rural infrastructure created jobs, expanded economic opportunities and helped ensure that rural communities continue to be great places to live, work, start a business and raise a family.

Secretary Perdue set a goal for USDA to be the most efficient, most effective and most customer focused USDA ever. Rural Development continues to strive for

efficiency by streamlining some regulations and cutting red tape that was making it difficult for rural customers to access our programs in the first place. We are effective by strategically realigning some program areas all the way at the top in DC to the further reaches of our field offices, all the while pumping out more dollars into the rural areas while employees teleworked from home. Our bread and butter are our customers and we are the only agency within USDA that has a field-based delivery system in place that can reach all 1.5 million rural residents of Wisconsin.

We work and play in the community you live in. If any of our programs spoke to you, visit [www.rd.usda.gov/wi](http://www.rd.usda.gov/wi) to get more information and call us at 715-345-7600 or email [wi-rd-stateoffice@usda.gov](mailto:wi-rd-stateoffice@usda.gov) discuss your needs.

*-Frassetto is Wisconsin USDA rural development state director.*