

# Julie Lassa: On the road to success in rural America

Posted on Tuesday, May 17, 2022

*The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.*

These past few months, I've traveled to rural communities across the state to hear from residents, businesses owners and ag producers about the positive difference the USDA is making when we invest in rural America. From the comments I've heard, many projects would have been difficult to impossible to achieve if not for the support of USDA. Under the leadership of President Biden and Ag Secretary Vilsack, I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with people and businesses who call rural Wisconsin home.

Since our founding, rural Americans have made up the bedrock of our nation's economy. Rural America is the source of the food we eat, the water we drink and the energy we use.

Today, rural communities remain the key to our nation's success.

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Earlier last month, senior leaders in the Biden-Harris Administration embarked on a one-of-a-kind road trip through rural America to solidify this covenant with the people who live there.

They have been visiting small towns and rural communities all over the country to listen, learn and find out from the people themselves how historic levels of federal funding can best help their communities.

The Building a Better America Rural Infrastructure Tour is part of the effort to refocus the nation's attention on the value and importance of rural people and

places.

Under the leadership of President Biden, Vice President Harris and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, USDA is committed to unlocking the full potential of rural communities and doing it on their terms.

For example, I recently visited the Village of Viola, a small community of nearly 700 residents and 30 businesses, to help them celebrate the groundbreaking for new water and wastewater infrastructure. With help from over \$2.3 million in funding through USDA's Water & Environmental Programs, and a partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Viola is relocating vital infrastructure out of the floodplain as frequent flooding caused water pump failure and sewer main backups in residences and businesses.

I also heard about how the dream to own an apple orchard and raspberry farm became reality while visiting Ed and Peggy Callahan on their Dream Apple Farm in Port Washington. Thanks to a \$49,500 Value-Added Producer Grant through USDA, the Callahans were able to expand their product line and hire employees which will increase their customer base by 1,700 people and increase revenue by \$127,000.

In Dekorra, Wisconsin, I saw how a \$250,000 grant through USDA's Rural Energy for America Program allowed animal genetics improvement company ABS Global to purchase and install a 657-kilowatt solar array. This renewable infrastructure will help the company generate nearly 867,000 kilowatt hours of electricity using climate-smart technology – enough electricity to power 80 homes. It will also save them nearly \$61,000 in annual energy costs.

The Building a Better America Rural Infrastructure Tour is one way we're helping rural communities access federal resources that make projects like these possible. We want to make it easier for them to know what to request, how to apply and the steps they need to take to receive the new infrastructure funds.

The investments we're making now will ensure everyone in rural Wisconsin has the opportunity to succeed, and that they can find that opportunity right at home—today and for generations to come.

Learn more at [www.rd.usda.gov/wi](http://www.rd.usda.gov/wi).

Lassa is Wisconsin state director, USDA Rural Development.